


dominican monastic search

This issue originated in the papers
which could not be included in
"Conference Communications." Further
comments and papers can be sent to the
President of the Conference of the Nuns
of the Order of Preachers in the United
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Our Dominican monastic search for God has led us to this search
for our heritage from Dominic and from Christian monasticism,
and the relationship between them. There are also papers on
study as a specific element in our lives which helps us fulfil
our share in the ministry of the Word. Some of the things
included here are the stories we tell about our ancestors; some
are the reports of our sisters in other countries. And in the
center of it all is the review of a book on prayer.
While everyone might not agree with everything expressed, we
hope all will be as grateful for the communication and enrichment
as we are. The brother of one of our sisters offered to zerox
this copy and we did what we could to conserve paper. We have
enjoyed typing the papers and would like to think another
monastery will find a way to provide another issue should there
be enough papers again. North Guilford Monastery

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-Conference of the Nuns
of the Order of Preachers
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APPROACHES TO OUR CHARISM

I. STRUCTURES

In the years following Vatican Council II's publication of the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life (October 1965), much emphasis has been placed on key norms delineated by the Council Fathers: a return to the Gospel sources and to the spirit and aims of the founder. Recent community discussions reveal some confusion about the precise meaning of some of the terms bound up with St. Dominic's charism and mission.

FAMILY One of these terms is "Family". In what sense do we, as Dominican nuns, speak of our contemplative communities as "families"? Is there in the Church a broad spectrum of interpretation in this area, or, does "family" have a more or less univocal meaning? After studying whatever resources we had on hand, we offer the results of our research and reflection, and invite comment. It was not our intent to stir up controversy or to unfavorably compare one institute's spirit with that of another - all are inspired by God. But we do believe that in our times it would be of help to be able to discern what is properly "ours" in this tradition.

While all religious institutes in the Church take the Gospel as their supreme norm, God certainly has inspired founders and foundresses to build upon very different structural models. St. Benedict, for example, patterned his Order upon the model of the Roman "paterfamilias". The superior was the "Abbot" or "Father" (or, "Abbess" - "Mother"). The natural family unit was "supernaturalized" and worked into a marvelously rich and warm synthesis which has stood the test of centuries. But St. Ignatius of Loyola, on the other hand, used the model of a military company. To this day the Jesuits refer to themselves as a "Company". Where did St. Dominic seek his model? In the words of Fr. Vicaire, commenting on the Order's BASIC CONSTITUTION:

"The genius of St. Dominic was able to discover and actualize in his Order, between 1215 and 1221, an original synthesis of several independent traditions which the contemporary Church offered him at the end of a long period of development. This synthesis, which embodies the very notion of the mendicant Orders, born in the 13th century from a particular reading of the New Testament by Christians of every sort as well as from the inspiration of a saint, proved immediately fruitful and, in essence, due to last through the centuries, like a new biological species. It has as its basis an extremely vital logical bond between the MISSION of the apostles - the evangelization of the Word of God dealt with in the first three paragraphs - and the COMMUNITY (communio) of the same apostles which is the object of most of the other paragraphs in our present constitution." (THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION: a Commentary, by M. H. Vicaire, O.P., p. 7.)

Granted this vital link between "missio-communio" at the heart of St. Dominic's vision, what impact can it have on the life of the nuns? Our own apostolate is exercised in a hidden way. Have our structures, then, been modeled on that of the brethren or on that of the older monastic tradition, and particularly on that arising from the Benedictine-Cistercian line?

SAINT BENEDICT'S VIEW, DEVELOPING OUT OF EGYPTIAN EREMITISM

Since there is little danger of Dominican nuns confusing their charism with that of the Jesuits (at least, not yet!), we would like to touch briefly on some of the distinctive notes of the great Benedictine spirit. All of our quotations are taken from Claude Piefer, O.S.B., in his excellent work, *MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY*. Tracing the beginnings of Western monasticism to its Egyptian roots, Fr. Piefer comments:

"Thus monastic obedience arose as a pedagogical necessity. The monk is obedient to a teacher who is more accomplished than he in the spiritual art, because there is no other way of being certain that what he does will be in obedience to God. The master's authority is not of the hierarchical order, however, but is essentially charismatic." (p. 276)

Since obedience is here viewed not as a value in itself, it cannot be exercised or extolled as a form of renunciation possessing an independent value of its own. "Therefore," continues Fr. Piefer, "a monk can outgrow the need for obedience. If the sole reason for it is his inability to perceive the will of God by himself, it ceases to be necessary as soon as this defect has been overcome. . . . At this point the monk ceases to be a disciple and can himself become the teacher of others." In this ancient Eastern view, "the community was not so much a social organism as a group of individual disciples gathered about an outstanding teacher. This is not to deny that there was a true community life and sense of brotherhood in these monasteries, but merely to affirm that their point of departure was the abbot who grouped disciples about himself, that the social structure served the spiritual formation of the individual monks and not vice versa, and that the relationship of the individual monks to the master was more significant than that of the monks to one another." (p. 277) "The cenobite therefore obeys his abbot for two reasons: because he wishes to be a martyr, offering the sacrifice of his own will, and because he wishes to be directed by the voice of God, manifested in the commands of his superior." (p. 282)

St. Benedict viewed his abbeys as "Schools of perfection". Although he built up a solid monastic family life, he left the door open, one might say, for the day when an individual monk might "graduate" and leave the monastery for a life in solitude. In this tradition, the purely contemplative life takes precedence over the "mixed" life, at least as an ideal.

Fr. Piefer also notes that this more ancient concept of obedience jars with a notion frequently heard today. In St. Benedict's eyes, obedience is not conceived of as an administrative necessity. (p. 284) To quote Father once again, "In this respect the ancient monastic tradition is sharply distinguished from a concept of religious obedience which is widespread today. According to this view, the purpose of obedience is to insure the common good of the society and provide for the efficient accomplishment of its apostolic undertakings. In order for a community to function smoothly, efficiently and as a unity, there must be a central authority which will dispose all things for the good of the whole body." To reduce the role of the superior to that of an administrator is out of line with the whole monastic tradition. "For St. Benedict as for his predecessors, the abbot is the keystone of the monastery: the spiritual father who engenders the community, the exemplary monk, the shepherd of the flock, the father of the family and the administrator of its affairs." (p. 285) Clearly, the Abbot's role as Father of the Family is intimately bound up with the obedience owed him.

SAINT DOMINIC'S VIEW

When St. Dominic responded to the urgent needs of his time, and with God's help devised a "new thing" to meet these needs, he necessarily broke with many of

the time-honored monastic customs. He did not build his Order upon the model of a natural family unit, patriarchal or matriarchal. For him, all was to be sought and found in the Gospel concept of "koinonia" or "fellowship in Christ". By baptism and faith we are truly incorporated into the Body of Christ. In Him we enjoy fellowship with other members of the Body as our "brothers and sisters in Christ". St. Dominic organized a supernaturally-based brotherhood and sisterhood, and not a family in the Benedictine sense. It is most important to stress this difference, for, as Fr. William Hinnebusch, O.P., remarks, "The distinctive way that Dominic combined the ideals, values and principles that inspired him in founding his Order embody his spirit." (RENEWAL, p. x) In the opinion of Fr. Hinnebusch, the manner in which this brotherhood was conceived has moved far from the orbit of St. Benedict's "non-functional" stress. "The Order's brotherhood matches the modern drive toward human solidarity and socialization. Its democratic government, with its recognition of responsibility, is in accord with the current appreciation of the human person and the principle of subsidiarity. The rounded structuring of Dominic's life, stressing end and means in proportion, is completely functional." (RENEWAL, p. 45) Our own Constitutions, #22, Art. II, SI, put the matter in similar words: "In order to continue faithfully in its spirit and mission, a community needs a principle of unity which it obtains through obedience." But perhaps the classic text here is SVI of the BASIC CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER, which reads: "The structure of the Order as a religious society originates in its mission and its life as a community of brothers The better to carry out this mission, the Order is exempt from the local bishop and has its own unity in the Master of the Order, to whom as head of the brotherhood, we all are directly linked by our profession.

If there is no room for doubt about St. Dominic's desire to organize his followers as a "brotherhood", can the same be said of the nuns? Do we belong more to the older Cistercian tradition, or is there evidence that St. Dominic inserted us deliberately and directly within the "missio-communio" structure of his Order? As far as I have been able to discover from the available data, the answer is that we, too, must think of ourselves as a "sisterhood" rather than as a "family" in the older monastic sense. But it is equally important here to note that the "sisterhood" in question is not one derived from purely natural relationships. "Fellowship" in the Gospel sense, was the "current word that denoted the fraternal sharing of eschatological blessings poured down by God with the Holy Spirit after Christ's resurrection and distributed to believers by the apostles by means of word and sacrament." (A NEW CATHOLIC COMMENTARY ON HOLY SCRIPTURE) As the commentator goes on to note, ". . . the Church is the home of the kingdom, where believers are one in Christ and in the Spirit. They enjoy fellowship with Christ, with the Apostles, and with one another. The bond of koinonia is the Eucharist, through which God's family can perpetuate its gratitude for the ever-present Cross of Christ." Such a view of "family" has definite eschatological orientations. It accents the truth that we cannot call God our "Father" nor even recognize Him as such apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ and our incorporation into His Body. "Fellowship" in this context is no mere comradeship. It is the deepest expression of charity man can reach, and it would be wrong to view it solely as a "functional" relationship. Even though such a concept of brotherhood or sisterliness does not derive from "flesh and blood" and does not depend upon those structures proper to human family life, far from suffering deprivation on that account, it is all the richer for transcending the merely human. St. Benedict and St. Dominic, indeed, all the great founders and foundresses, were aiming at the same goal, but they did not all follow the same path to the summit. In our tradition it seems impossible to separate the notions of structure, obedience, charism, etc., and still retain the founder's spirit. And this is no doubt due to the complete oneness of the Order's aims. (Cf. BASIC CONSTITUTION OF THE NUNS, I, SII.)

THE NUN'S TRADITION

Fr. Vicairé notes that in its earliest developments, the nuns' community had a distinctly Cistercian orientation. (SAINT DOMINIC AND HIS TIMES, p. 128) He even offers the view that St. Dominic would have incorporated his group of converted ladies within the Cistercian Order, had that been possible. Since, however, the General Chapter of the Cistercians had just forbidden the incorporation of any more monasteries of nuns, St. Dominic had to draw up for his nuns a Rule and Institutes of their own. And he did this with the intent of aligning them even more closely with his work of Holy Preaching. Neither the prior nor the prioress of Sainte Marie de Prouille ever bore the title of abbot or abbess, states Fr. Vicairé. (p. 127) And this is highly significant, since we also know how closely St. Dominic worked with the Cistercian Abbots in planning for his young foundation. After an initial period of searching, the decision was made: "At that time (after 1216) there was drawn up, either written out in full or adapted from a corrected version of an earlier text, a rule of observance which took as its basis the customs of St. Dominic's order for men." (p. 128)

We have further confirmation of these facts in the few documents which have come down to us from these earliest years. The only extant letter from St. Dominic to the Nuns (of Madrid) opens with the following salutation:

"Friar Dominic, Master of the Preachers, to the dear (or beloved) prioress and to the whole convent of the nuns of Madrid, health and daily progress. . . ."

Nothing could be further removed from the customary salutation of an Abbot General to an Abbess.

Our formula of Profession still retains the original "flavor" in its wording: "I, Sister N.N., make profession and promise obedience to God and to the Blessed Mary and St. Dominic and the Master of the Order of Brothers Preachers and to you, Sister N.N., Prioress of this Monastery. . . ." There is never, in any of our official documents, mention of the Prioress as "Abbess" or "Mother". Rather, as with the brethren, the Prioress is "first among equals" in the sisterhood. And this in no way lessens her authority. Documents giving the names of some of the earliest nuns mention that "Sister Guillemine" was Prioress of Ste. Marie de Prouille and "Sister Blanche" of the community formed at San Sisto. The latter is particularly significant since the new community was composed, for the most part, of two former Benedictine abbeys. Yet, the nuns renounced their first heritage and accepted the new expression of Gospel Fellowship. And they were richly rewarded for such poverty of spirit.

Our new Constitutions faithfully detail this special heritage of ours. Section I, Chapter I, Art. 1, Common Life, is filled with references to it. "As the Church of the Apostles, so among us, communion is founded, built up and stabilized in the same Spirit in Whom we receive the Word of God the Father in one faith, contemplate Him with one heart and praise Him with one mouth; in Whom we are made one body, sharing one bread; in Whom, finally, we hold all things in common." Or (SI), "In order that each monastery may be a fraternal community (perhaps we would prefer to say "sisterly") all accept and regard each other as members of the same body, differing in natural dispositions and gifts but equals in the bond of charity and by profession." Or (#25, SIV), "The Sisters in a spirit of faith and love for God's will and sincerely seeking to understand their superior's intentions in a spirit of fraternal cooperation, should promptly and conscientiously carry out their instruction. . . ." Quotations could be multiplied. But all point in one direction: whenever the word "family" is used in our Dominican tradition, it is to be understood in the sense of "fraternal or sisterly fellowship in the Body of Christ". And blessed are we to have received such a supernaturally permeated vision of human relations. Again, to cite Fr. Vicairé: "The unity

of life of the friars, indeed, which derives already from the community of supernatural purpose in their basic acts (cum Deo vel de Deo) follows also from the evangelical prototype upon which the founder formally modeled himself, the life of the apostles in its over-all completeness." (Commentary on Paragraph IV of the FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER) We might also note how far from authentic is the view that "communio" means simple "togetherness" or the "doing of all things in the same way and at the same time and, where possible, in the same place". "Common life" in its apostolic origins meant something much deeper and also involved an economic aspect, for all goods were shared in common.

CONCLUSIONS

We would conclude that it was not by chance but by providential disposition that the Dominican Nuns were never given a St. Clare or a St. Teresa of Avila. As Sr. Cecilia put it, "They would have no other master who instructed them concerning the Order" than St. Dominic himself. Our hidden lives were to be at one with the aims of the Order. "The nuns as well as the brethren should direct their whole lives to perfect charity towards God and neighbor, caring for and procuring the effective salvation of men, regarding themselves first and foremost as members of Christ, giving themselves totally for the gaining of souls, as the Lord Jesus the Savior of all offered Himself totally for our salvation." (Nuns' BASIC CONSTITUTION) With us, expressions such as "maternal charism" or "spiritual motherhood" should be avoided or used with much caution since the analogy which fits us best is that of the Body of Christ and our hidden function in it. St. Dominic wanted us to "be there" - where the action was - by our spiritual presence and assistance. Hence it is necessary that we share as fully as possible in the total life of the Order, including the expression of its structures and ideals.

CONTEMPORARY CHURCH TEACHING

One might wonder how this picture of our life squares with the teachings of the Magisterium in recent years. We could make numerous citations but select from what might be called THE definitive commentary on religious life, Pope Paul VI's magnificent EVANGELICA TESTIFICATIO of 1971. #11 of that document reads: "In reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who is always at work within the Church." With regard to consecrated obedience, Pope Paul wrote, "Following the example of Christ, who came to do the will of the Father, and in communion with him 'who learned to obey through suffering' and 'ministered to the brethren', you have assumed a firmer commitment to the ministry of the Church and of your brethren." (#23) And again, "The evangelical aspiration to fraternity was forcefully expressed by the Council." (#24) And finally, one quotation touching the relationships between superiors and those whom they govern: "Far from being in opposition to one another, authority and individual liberty go together in the fulfillment of God's will, which is sought fraternally through a trustful dialogue between the superior and his brother, in the case of a personal situation, or through a general agreement regarding what concerns the whole community." (#25) We can only conclude that St. Dominic and his vision of religious community life is still very much "in medio ecclesiae".

We realize that we have dealt with only one part of our Dominican heritage. Many other areas could be profitably investigated, such as our ascetical tradition, our devotional tradition, the particular manner in which "study" is related to "lectio divina" and ultimately to contemplation. Perhaps others of our sisters would wish to submit papers similar to this one, and gradually we could build up a body of "informed opinion", drawn from honest research. That would be a service

to us all as we attempt to identify our charism and express it in ways compatible with our present times and situations. If we are not meant to "conform ourselves" to the modern mentality or the modern world, nevertheless, we are expected to translate our heritage into language and customs which faithfully embody its meaning in contemporary forms.

Resources used for this paper:

THE BASIC CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER

THE BASIC CONSTITUTION OF THE NUNS and the CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS

Ciappi, O.P., Cardinal Luigi, "A Sound Ecclesiology for a Healthy and Vigorous Religious Life", 1978.

Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, Vatican Council II, 1965.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican Council II, 1964.

"Ecclesiae sanctae II", 1966.

Fuller, Johnston, Kearns (editors), A NEW CATHOLIC COMMENTARY ON HOLY SCRIPTURE, (Nelson, 1969), "Koinonia".

Hinnebusch, O.P., William, HISTORY OF THE ORDER (Alba House, 1973), and RENEWAL, Dominicana, 1968.

Lehner, O.P., Francis, SAINT DOMINIC: BIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTS (Thomist Press, 1964).

Paul VI, Evangelica Testificatio, 1971.

Piefer, O.S.B., Claude, MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY (Sheed and Ward, 1966).

Vicaire, O.P., M.H., SAINT DOMINIC AND HIS TIMES (Mc Graw-Hill, 1964).

In addition, SACRAMENTUM MUNDI and SACRAMENTUM VERBI, together with the new English Leonine edition of St. Thomas' works were also consulted.

VOCATION OF THE DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVE NUNS

(In response to a letter about a double heritage)

Our thoughts seem to be moving in somewhat similar directions. This is a very inept attempt to answer your question, but it may supply clues for further consideration of the question of a "double heritage."

From one point of view a double heritage: Dominican and purely monastic-contemplative, as you mention.

There is also the possibility that the purely contemplative-monastic element could be considered as the generic base (cf. P.C. 9), with the Dominican aspect as the specialized or specific element which is neither accidental nor incidental.

Recently I have been considering a third approach. St. Dominic was a contemplative and led a purely contemplative life as a canon of Osma before he became an apostle and founded the Order of Preachers.

Would not this purely contemplative-monastic life which St. Dominic led as a canon of Osma be the part which his daughters have inherited from him and could it not be considered Dominican for us as his contemplative branch? Here are my reasons:

- I "The hidden life which Dominic was leading in his religious house (at Osma) was par excellence the contemplative life. . . . It was principally a life of solitude, a life of complete recollection in God" (cf. Vicaire, p. 43).
- II St. Dominic was well acquainted with the contemplative life and monastic practice of the Fathers and Monks of the Desert, both eremitic and cenobitic.

The Institutes and Conferences of Cassian were his bedside reading. "With the help of grace, this book led him to a degree of purity of conscience difficult of attainment, to much light on contemplation and to a high summit of perfection" (Bl. Jordan #13, cited by Vicaire). "The discipline of Christ, spiritual struggle, and combat against the demon, silence, contemplation fed by the Holy Scriptures, such were the lessons of the great anchorites. It was obviously to imitate their African austerities that Dominic thought out his discreet abstention from meat. He took other things from them" (cf. Vicaire, p. 43).

Could the following be among the "other things" St. Dominic borrowed from St. Pachomius via the Conferences of Cassian? (Incidentally, the Rule of St. Pachomius was the prototype of both Eastern and Western rules. He was the first Master of the cenobitic or common life.)

- A. Consecration to the Word. Constant meditation (ruminatio) on the Word of God. Pachomian cenobites had the Gospels constantly in their hands, "the Bible held a place equal to the Eucharist in their lives." All had to learn to read so as to be able to meditate on the Word of God. They knew the Psalter and a great part of the Gospels by heart.
- B. Remarkable equilibrium between common life and solitude.
- C. Obedience was the specific condition for common life. Poverty and chastity were presupposed (hence one vow of obedience for Dominicans?).
- D. Holding of goods in common.
- E. Common prayer (Psalms and lessons) not notably longer than the modern Liturgy of the Hours.

III St. Dominic was certainly familiar with the Rule of St. Benedict both independently and through his close contacts with the Cistercians. In the Primitive Constitutions of San Sisto, edited by St. Dominic, explicit mention is made of the Rule of St. Benedict and the Customs of Citeaux. Furthermore, the majority of the first Nuns from the five Roman monasteries who were incorporated into the Monastery of San Sisto had followed the Rule of St. Benedict.

Did St. Dominic draw upon the Statutes of the Sisters of Premontre? The answer is no, and Father Vicaire confirms this. The first Sisters of Premontre were similar to lay sisters. They assisted at the Office of the canons, but followed the chanting of the hours in silence. Otherwise they gave themselves entirely to manual labor.

Father Vicaire, however, does see a clear relationship between the second part of the Rule of San Sisto and the Rule of Sempringham. This is extremely interesting. The Rule of Sempringham is a mishmash. "To the Nuns he (St. Gilbert of Sempringham) gave the Rule of the blessed Benedict; to the learned brothers (the canons) the Rule of St. Augustine; and to all, the example of Christ and His Saints. . . ." He "studied the Cistercian Rule" during his stay at Clairvaux in 1147-48 when St. Bernard helped him to adapt it to his Order. He borrowed largely from the Charter of Charity, the Institutes and Book of Uses as well as from the usages of the Augustinians and Premonstratensians. The Rule of his lay brothers was borrowed from the Cistercian Institutes. St. Gilbert willed that his Nuns should keep the strict Rule of St. Benedict (Cistercian style) following the customs of the canons "so far as their sex permitted." From this I think we could safely draw the conclusion that the spirit of the Gilbertine Nuns was certainly Benedictine-Cistercian even though some of their customs were taken from the canons of Premontre and Augustine.

Up to this point we can safely assert that the Dominican Nuns come by their contemplative-monastic heritage from St. Dominic. Just as St. Benedict in drawing up his Rule studied the earlier traditions of Cassian, Pachomius, Basil and Augustine, so had St. Dominic. And just as St. Benedict had built monastic tradition into true legislation, so had St. Dominic given to his Nuns an authentic monastic-contemplative formation incorporating what was best in the monastic tradition up to the 13th century. This would include Benedictine and Cistercian borrowings as already demonstrated.

As far as we can ascertain the Rule which St. Dominic gave to the Nuns of Prouille (1216) was absorbed into the Rule of San Sisto (1220-1221) which was edited by St. Dominic himself.

Around 1244 St. Raymond drew up special rules and prescriptions for the Nuns, bringing them into line with the Premontre Observances of the Friars. Unfortunately no copy of his redaction is extant. However, Father Creytens, O.P., has demonstrated that the Constitutions of Montargis, 1245, (though not an exact copy, but an adaption) with rare exceptions, faithfully follows the original text of the Constitutions of St. Raymond of Penafort. The Constitutions of Montargis in turn became the model of the official Constitutions of 1259 known as the Constitutions of Humbert of the Romans.

In 1259 Humbert of the Romans abolished all previous constitutions of the Dominican Nuns, including that of Montargis and imposed his constitutions. It is these constitutions, with very little change (cf. Father Jandel's redaction, 1868, based on Father Potton's translation of 1864), that the Nuns followed until the Gillet constitutions of 1930.

All references to the Benedictine Rule and the Customs of Citeaux were deleted in the Montargis and Humbert of the Romans' constitutions. "Study of doctrine" had replaced "study of letters" in the San Sisto constitutions; but all reference to study of letters or doctrine was carefully deleted in Humbert's Constitutions. However, the promise of stability (and common life) was retained until the imposition of the Gillet constitutions.

Montargis and Humbert's constitutions are detailed, legalistic, less monastic, but more in line with the Fathers. In the long run this meant an impoverishment in the monastic-contemplative tradition of the Nuns. Our present experimental constitutions reflect more of the mind of St. Dominic than any of the preceding ones, except, of course, San Sisto which he drew up himself. So much for the double heritage!

There is a rather close kinship between the Cistercian, Carmelite and Dominican Nuns. We are indebted to the Cistercians, and the Carmelites are indebted to us. Perhaps we might be called spiritual cousins.

Our relationship to the Cistercians has been amply developed, demonstrated and documented.

Our relationship to the Carmelites can also be proved. The Dominican Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher was commissioned by the Pope to draw up the Carmelite constitutions when they became mendicants in the 13th century. It was to these constitutions that St. Teresa returned when she instituted her reform. She says so herself in her autobiography. Furthermore she had great devotion to St. Dominic and prayed to him often, and had been promised that he would always assist her. Dominicans came to her defense, and did she not say that she was a Dominican at heart?

What then distinguishes us from other contemplatives? Father Aniceto Fernandez put it well in his letter to the Nuns: "Thus the contemplative life of the Nuns contributes most importantly to the apostolate of the Order, not only because, like other contemplative souls, they offer their life and prayer to God to supply the apostolic needs of the Church, but also because their life and contemplation as far as they are really and truly dominican, are from the beginning, of their very nature and essentially ordered to the apostolate which the entire dominican family exercises, in which the fullness of the dominican vocation consists."

This has been reinforced by a juridical bond. As far as I know this is not the case with the Carmelites and Poor Clares.

The emphasis on study (sacred doctrine) is another characteristic which St. Dominic well knew fostered contemplation and is an immense help in keeping and hearing the Word of God. Besides, at Prouille he was dealing with converts from the Albigensians. These girls and women had been well instructed in heretical teaching and well educated in the schools run by the Perfect. St. Dominic was only too keenly aware that he had to meet their spiritual and intellectual needs by careful direction and sound doctrine. And he did the same for the Nuns of San Sisto.

No matter how you approach it, the Dominican Nun fulfills her vocation primarily as one "consecrated to the Word." She has through St. Dominic the full weight of monastic tradition going back to St. Pachomius and beyond them to the early Christians.

Another characteristic of our vocation as Dominican Nuns is balance between solitude and community life, silence and fraternal life, prayer and manual labor. All monastic contemplatives have practically the same observances which the Council has called the "essential elements of the monastic institution" (Ad Gentes, 18) and "those exercises proper to the contemplative life" (P.C. 7). These are:

Separation from the world ("in solitude and silence")

Life of prayer ("in assiduous prayer . . . free for the exclusive search for God")

Austerity of life ("fervent penance")

Manual labor (for cenobites)

Common life (for cenobites)

Some emphasize one aspect, some another. For us, it would be consecration to the Word of God, close bond with the Order and a fine balance of the essential elements of the monastic-contemplative life.

CENOBITIC BEGINNINGS: THE PACHOMIAN MONASTIC EXPERIENCE

Christian monasticism began in the Egyptian deserts. In Lower Egypt a semi-eremitical monasticism flourished while Upper Egypt saw the growth of a more cenobitic form under the leadership of Pachomius. It is my experience that the literature that witnesses to these forms of monastic life deserves our attention today. In this paper I hope to share something I have tasted or glimpsed. It is not the product of a thorough and organized study; I am in no way an expert.¹ But I do believe that their tradition is ours, and to meet them is to know ourselves better.

The literature of Pachomian monasticism² is quite primitive, by our standards of literary sophistication, and in some ways it is similar to the style of the New Testament, particularly the Synoptic Gospels. This is true not only of the literary style which tends to be associative in its construction, but of its purpose as well, which is to invite the next generation into the experience of those who are writing, the experience of being transformed by the Spirit, by the Gospel. The purpose of the writings is not information but formation and transformation. When we go to these records of the past we go to enter into their experience of the Spirit so we can discover and live more consciously our own experience, for there is but one Spirit.

Pachomian monasticism presents us with perhaps the earliest model, of which we have record, of monks coming together, not around the abba for spiritual formation, but together to seek God in community. In this Pachomius gave concrete expression to a form of monastic life which had gradually been evolving, an expression of the evangelical value of community, where the primary relationships of the monks are with one another. These two models, on the one hand, the monks gathered about the spiritual father and on the other, the monks who have come together to form a community,³ at this early stage in monastic history had this essential difference: the young monks who grouped themselves about the spiritual father came to learn to be monks, so that having been formed by the abba they could leave him to live as monks on their own. This eventually gave rise to a cenobitic form of monasticism, but one in which each monk's relationship with the spiritual father was primary. Pachomius, however, took the Jerusalem community of Acts 2 and 4 as the model for community. Those who came to him came not for a time, but they gave the whole of their lives and all that they had to seek God in common, and to love and serve one another, as they saw that these are inextricably bound together for those who seek to live the Gospel.⁴ The essential aspect of Pachomian life was koinonia, unity in love. In this especially, Dominican monasticism can look to Pachomian monasticism, for we, as they, have come together to seek God in community, and to love and serve one another. The opening chapter of the Rule of St. Augustine emphasizes our goal of unity in love.

Before all things, most dear Sisters, we must love God and after Him our neighbor; for these are the principal commands which have been given us.

The following things, then, we direct you, who live in the Monastery, to observe.

First, that you dwell together in unity in the Monastery, and be of one mind and one heart in the Lord, since this is the end for which you are come here.⁵

Pachomius' great charism was to be the center of a community, to teach monks to love and serve one another; but like most of us he learned through trial and error.

The Coptic Lives⁶ report that when his first group of followers joined him, he understood that the will of God for him was to serve the others. So he took the burden of all the practical necessities upon himself and freed the others to study the Scriptures. Pachomius, through the whole of his life, was one to be very patient with the newcomer and there are many examples of how he would not demand something of a young monk, even though it was something quite important, until he could see the monk was ready to meet the demand. His patience in this initial venture lasted something like five years. When he saw that his monks were not maturing as monks he, after a night in prayer, drew up three rules: common prayer, common meals and common work. They refused and he expelled them. The second time young monks joined him, he was more conscious of their spiritual formation and made these demands at once.

From the beginning of their lives together, Pachomius consciously set about teaching the monks to love and serve one another, and established a community wherein each monk had the responsibility of serving the rest in a specific capacity.⁷ The first member of the Pachomian community, however, was always God. This is everywhere in the writings, and on his deathbed the Life has Pachomius say, "I am going to the Lord who has created us and brought us together."⁸

The Pachomian monks understood well that their lives were part of a continuing history. This history began when God first spoke to the human race and one of its members responded; since that moment the dialogue has never stopped. Just as the Word of God was the source of Abraham's life of faith, the Word of God was the source of their own lives and faith. They express this clearly when, in the Prologue to The Life of Pachomius, they locate monastic life within the whole of salvation history. It is a response to the creative Word of God and results from the fervor of the Church, especially of the martyrs.

True is the Word of God, who made all things, the Word that came to our father Abraham, in order to show him his favor, concerning the sacrifice of God's only son. The Lord said, "Truly I will bless you and multiply you as the stars of heaven in multitude;" and again "Because in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." For this Word, speaking after Moses his servant and the other prophets, appeared as man and as Abraham's seed, and fulfilled the promise of blessing to all the nations, saying to his disciples, "Go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And, as the gospel spread throughout the earth by divine assent and with proof of his faithfulness, pagan kings stirred up a great persecution against the Christians everywhere. Because many martyrs along with Peter, the archbishop of Alexandria, through many and sundry tortures were crowned with a victorious death, the Christian faith gained much ground and was strengthened in every land and every island throughout all the churches. As a result monasteries started coming into being and places for ascetics who prided themselves in their chastity and the renunciation of their possessions. When monks who were former pagans saw the struggles and the patience of the martyrs, they started a new life. Of them it was said, "Destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Thus they found retreats with proper piety and a harder regimen, holding before their eyes day and night not only the crucified Christ, but also the martyrs whom they had seen struggle so much.⁹

The Life also presents Pachomius himself, and therefore the monks who joined him, as part of an ongoing tradition, begun in the Old Testament and continued in the New.

The life of our truly virtuous and most ascetic father Anthony was like that of the great Elijah and Elisha and of John the Baptist. The

most holy archbishop Athanasius gives as much written evidence about him after his death, and at the same time states that the behavior of our holy father Amoun, the chief abbot of the brothers on Mount Nitria, and of Theodore, his companion, was the same. And we know that, since grace poured from the lips of the Blessed one who blesses all - for he visited the earth, and instead of filling it with grief and sighs, he infused it with an intoxicating spirit - throughout the country from among those who took to monastic life many became admirable fathers, as has already been said, and their names are in the book of the living. In Egypt and in the Thebaid not many had turned to the monastic life up to the time of the persecutions by Diocletian and Maximian, but after that, the bishops led people to God according to the teachings of the apostles and the repentance of the nations yielded a rich harvest. There was a man name Pachomius, born of pagan parents in the Thebaid, who, having received great mercy, became a Christian. He made progress and achieved perfection as a monk. It is necessary to recount his life from childhood on to the glory of God, who calls everyone from everywhere to his wondrous light.¹⁰

Because of the primitive style of the Pachomian Literature and its fairly unsystematic development, much of the wisdom it contains is perhaps less accessible to us than it would be if it were arranged in accord with the patterns of our Western logic. Of course, the price of this logic would be the beautiful simplicity that is everywhere in the writings. When I first read The Life of Pachomius, though I was quite taken with the charm of the work, I wasn't sure anything relevant or unified would emerge. For this reason I would like to suggest an approach which I believe can be quite helpful in getting closer to the heart of Pachomian monastic life. If we choose a specific topic, such as common life, asceticism, prayer, leadership, obedience or poverty and read through the Pachomian works in search of what each has to say about, or how it presents or understands whatever is being considered, and do the same for another topic on the above list, very soon we can see how all aspects of their monastic life are complementary and support its single aim solidly and practically. Also by noticing how the Rules are lived out in incidents related in the Life, we see how the strict or even harsh sounding rules actually were applied in genuinely human and loving ways.¹¹ In the remaining section of this paper, in a modified way, I hope to illustrate this method with examples from the Pachomian sources.

In the Life, it says of Pachomius, "When he started reading or reciting God's words by heart, he did not do it in the fashion of many other people, but he strove to comprehend inside himself each and every thing through humility and gentleness and truth, according to the Lord's word, 'Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart.'"¹² This paragraph can be taken as a paradigm of the Pachomian approach to the Scriptures and to prayer.

Pachomius and his monks shared the dynamic concept of the Word of God of the ancient Hebrew. They believed that it effected what it asserted, and they desired to be transformed by this living Word. The Word of God, they understood, had been planted in their hearts at baptism; when they read the Scriptures, they read to uncover the Word which had been hidden there.¹³ Pachomius' way, as shown above, is also the way given in the Scriptures. If the Lord said, "Learn from me because I am gentle and humble of heart," then Pachomius, even in his approach to the Scriptures and to the Lord, will make every effort to be humble and gentle and true. Lastly, the paragraph refers to reciting the Scriptures. Meditation for the Pachomian monk was reciting the Scriptures he had memorized. The incoming novice committed to memory at least the Psalter and the New Testament.¹⁴ Pachomius taught the unlettered Copts to read precisely so they could read and memorize the Scriptures.¹⁵

It is hard to separate the Pachomian concept of Scripture from their concept of

prayer, for there was little or no difference. The one was the other. Meditation on Scripture actually meant reciting memorized passages not just with the lips and mind, but with attention of the heart as well. The monks memorized the Scriptures in pericopes which they called "by hearts." (This phrase, "by hearts," eventually became a technical term so that they will describe their night office as consisting of "six by hearts.")¹⁶ Prayer to the Pachomian monk was the continual recitation of Scripture. His way of fulfilling the New Testament mandate, "Pray always," was very simply to recite or meditate Scripture all day and all night, if possible.

So when the monk was at work or on his way to the assembly or to his cell at night, he was to meditate on some text from Scripture which, because of his memory, he had always at hand. There are many precepts in the Rules which explain this. Here are some examples:

When he hears the sound of the trumpet summoning him to the assembly he is to leave his cell immediately, meditating on something from Scripture to the very door of the assembly hall. (3)

The one who hands out sweets to the brothers at the dining room door should meditate on something from the Scripture as he does so. (37)

When the assembly is dismissed, all leaving for their cells or for the refectory shall meditate on something from Scripture. (28)

(On leaving the monastery for work) . . . they shall not speak together, but each one shall meditate on something from Scripture. (59)

Perhaps the most developed expression of this is found in The Book of Our Father Horsiesi who is exhorting a community which had lost its fervor to return to the way Pachomius had given them:

Let us cultivate the reading and the learning of the Scripture, and let us always be employed in pondering on them, knowing that it is written: From the fruit of his mouth a man will be filled, and the wages of his labor is returned. These are the things that lead us to eternal life, which our father [Pachomius] handed down to us and commanded to be meditated upon perpetually in order that what is written may be completed in us: These will be the words which I give you today into your hearts and into your minds. . . . Consider with how many testimonies the word of the Lord exhorts us to meditate on the sacred scriptures, that by faith, we may possess what we say. . . . Timothy too, while still a boy was learned in sacred letters so that he arrived at faith of the Lord and Savior by way of them. . . . (51)

The Word of God in the Scriptures is given so that we may uncover the Word God has spoken in our hearts in baptism. Prayer or reciting the words of Sacred Scriptures is the way to the Word in our heart. Likewise, asceticism was seen in its relation to what God has already done in baptism, for all the fruits of the Spirit are given to us in this sacrament.¹⁷ Asceticism is the cultivation of these fruits; asceticism is a means to uncovering the Word in our hearts. In his Catechesis Concerning a Spiteful Monk, Pachomius writes:

My son, flee concupiscence. It beclouds the Spirit and prevents it from getting to know the secrets of God. It makes you foreign to the language of the Spirit and prevents you from carrying the cross of Christ. It does not permit the heart to be attentive to honoring God.

It is precisely in the fight against concupiscence, or anything which distracts the attention of the heart from God, that asceticism has its place. Thus asceticism is always an act of love which has its source in God's love.

Perhaps here we can examine a few of the Pachomian statements on the asceticism of silence. In speaking of prayer we already mentioned one (see rule 59 above). There are others:

Those at work shall speak of nothing secular; they shall either meditate on holy things, or for that matter, keep silence. (60)

As for the bakery: no one may speak during the evening kneading, nor in the morning, those who are busy with the baking or with the boards; but they shall recite together until they have finished. If they need anything they shall not speak, but shall rap sensibly. (116)

While they are sitting at home they are not permitted to engage in secular talk; but if the housemaster has taught something from Scripture they ought, on the other hand, to ruminate on it among themselves, relating what they have heard, or what they can remember. (122)

It is true that not every rule that mentions silence explicitly orients the silence to the Word of God, but most do; it is quite evident that in Pachomian life the asceticism of silence was seen as a main support for meditation on the Scriptures.

The Pachomian understanding of leadership was, in part, that the leader was the one whose responsibility it was to be watchful or vigilant for the spiritual well-being of all. Horsiesus addresses the superiors:

All those to whom the care of the brothers has been entrusted will prepare themselves for the coming of the Savior and his dreadful tribune. For if to give a report for one's self is full of danger and fear, how much more painful it will be to answer for the fault of another and to fall into the hands of the living God.

We also have a God given responsibility, the training of the brothers. (10, passim)

Or, looking at it the other way round, Pachomius' understanding of the superior's role can also be seen in his advice to the Spiteful Monk:

If you cannot get along alone, join another who is working according to the Gospel of Christ, and you will make progress with him. Either listen [i.e., to the Word of God], or submit to one who listens, or be strong and be called Elias, or obey the strong and be called Eliseus: for obeying Elias Eliseus received a double [portion] of Elias' spirit.

In short the advice is, if you can't hear the Word of the Lord spoken in the Scripture yourself, go and find a man who can, and then listen to him. The other side of the coin, then, is that one who is a leader has the responsibility of hearing the Word of God for those who have submitted themselves to him.

There is a story by which I hope to tie these elements together. It is rendered in different translations dating from different periods. Each edition reflects the viewpoint of its own time, as they altered texts freely in those days to assert what they wanted to say. Taken together these texts are quite interesting because they show how the aspects of monastic life I have already mentioned, scripture, prayer, asceticism and leadership, serve one another and form a whole. They also vividly depict evolving concepts of the rule and obedience, and show how it is part of human nature to become alienated in the course of time from its original inspiration. The original understanding was that obeying the rule was an act of love and that God dwells in the heart of one who loves. This concept was so pure that it was rapidly lost.¹⁸

The monks are making bread and chatting as they work, instead of reciting the Scriptures. Pachomius learns of it and blames Theodore, the monk in charge at the time, severely

reprimanding him. If the monks chat and do not recite the Scriptures, Theodore is responsible and Theodore must do penance. This is the earliest account. In the second version, Pachomius still blames Theodore but asks him why he did not see that the brothers respect the rule, since the rule is given them for the good of their souls. The idea of serving the rule usurps the primary place that reciting the Scriptures had held. In the third account, Pachomius does not blame Theodore (by the time of this account he has to respect the authority of his assistant) but tells him to teach the brothers that the rule has been given for the good of their souls and they should obey it.¹⁹ In the latest version, Pachomius asks Theodore whether the brothers realize that when he (Pachomius) gives them a rule, it is God speaking to them through him. The rule of silence gradually becomes identified with the will of God and its original purpose, to recite the Scriptures, is no longer mentioned. On paper, at least, their silence has grown empty.

There are many lessons we can draw from this incident and the differing historic interpretations. There is only one, however, that I want to focus on here. It is the understanding and practical insight that is inherent in the earliest account. In it all the elements, the common work, the asceticism of silence, the role of the leader or superior, Theodore, and his responsibility of watchfulness for all, the recitation of the Scriptures, all of these are seen in their relationship to the end of monastic life, the transformation of the monk, by the Word of God, in Christ. In my judgement, it is this evident comprehension of the unity of our life, which they were able to effectively portray and hand down that makes the legacy of Pachomius valid for us today.

Notes

1. My introduction to Pachomian monasticism came through the tapes of a seminar Father Armand Veilleux, OCSO, gave at Gethsemani Abbey. The seminar contained three evening lectures to the whole community and six morning lectures given to the seminar participants only. My notes then will read "tape 1 evening" or "tape 6 morning" according to when the lecture was given.

2. There are four basic texts in the Pachomian corpus that I refer to. Unfortunately only one has been published in English to my knowledge. It is _____, The Life of Pachomius (Vita Prima Graeca), Apostolos Athanassakis, trans. (Scholars Press, Missoula, Montana, 1975).

There are many extant Lives, from both Coptic and Greek sources. This first Greek Life or G₁, is the only Life available in English. References to the Coptic Lives in this paper are made from information Father Armand Veilleux gives in the seminar and will be noted accordingly. Each paragraph in the Life is numbered and all references to it will be identified in the note or the text by this paragraph number, not the page number.

The other texts of the Pachomian corpus to which I refer, I have seen only in translations that have been made and circulated privately. There is, however, an edition being prepared by Father Veilleux which should be published in the next year or two. I am sorry not to be able to provide more information on this. The texts I cite are:

Horsiesus, The Book of Our Father Horsiesi, Sister Mary Charles Walsh, OSB, trans.

Horsiesus was a successor to Pachomius after the latter's death, and this work is a call to communal conversion during a period of strife and decadence. Like the Life it is subdivided into numbered sections and my references are to those numbers.

_____, The Rules of St. Pachomius, Dom Amand Boon, ed., Pachomiona latina, Louvain Bureau de la Revue, 1932.

Jerome translated a Greek translation of the Coptic original of the Pachomian Rules into Latin. The text I use is an English translation of Jerome's text. Also extant are fragments of the Coptic Rules. Like the two preceding works each rule is numbered and I cite Jerome's numeration.

Pachomius, Catechesis Concerning a Spiteful Monk (from Oevres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples, Louvain: CSCO 160, Coptic Series #24, L. Th. Lefort, translator and editor, 1956).

Written by Pachomius himself, this catechesis was composed not for his own monks but for a monk from outside the community. The monk was brought to Pachomius because he bore a grudge toward one who "darted a word" at him (tape 6 morning).

3. Keating, Thomas, "The Two Streams of Cenobitic Tradition in RSB," Cistercian Studies XI, 1976:4, pp. 257-68. This article cites the evolution of both forms, complete with appropriate diagrams and mention of Pachomius.

4. An example of how much the monks were for one another what the abba was in the semi-eremitical tradition is found in this item from the Rules:

In the morning, in the individual houses, once the prayers have been finished, they shall not return to their own cells, but they shall share among themselves what they have heard the Masters giving out; then they shall go to their cubicles. (19)

5. Constitutions of the Nuns of the Sacred Order of Preachers (Polygot Vatican Press, 1930), p. 1.

6. Tape 2 evening. An altered account of this is in the Life, para. 24-5, 37.

7. Life, para. 28.

8. Tape 3 evening.

9. Para. 1.

10. Para. 2.

11. The monks did not eat meat. Note, however, the following incident from the Life:

There was another brother who was mortally ill and bedridden in a nearby cell. He requested from the father of the monastery to be fed a small portion of meat -- the length of his illness had reduced his body to skin and bones --, and because the meat was not given him, he told one of the brothers, "Support me and take me to our father Pachomius." When he approached Pachomius, he fell on his face and told him the reason. Pachomius realized that the man deserved the request, and he sighed. At meal time Pachomius was served his portion, as were all the other brothers. He did not eat, but said, "You are respecters of persons. What has happened to the scripture, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'? Do you not see that this man is practically dead? Why did you not take good care of him at all before he made his request? And you will say, 'We neglected him,

because that sort of food is not customary among us.' But does the disease not make a difference? Are not all things pure to those who are pure? And if you were unable to see without my advice that this would be good, why did you not tell me?" Tears came to his eyes, as he was saying these things. For tears are a mark of sensitivity. And even if tears do not come to a man who is sensitive while something is happening, there is such a thing as inner weeping. When they heard these things they hastened to buy the meat in order to feed the enfeebled man. Then Pachomius himself ate the customary boiled vegetable. (53)

12. Para. 9.

13. Tape 2 morning. Horsiesi, para. 49, ". . . Let us follow the odor of wisdom always hiding her words in our hearts."

14. From the Rules:

No one whosoever shall be in the monastery who . . . does not retain something from Scripture: the minimum is the New Testament and the Psalter. (140)

If someone comes to the gate of the monastery wishing to renounce the world and be added to the number of the brothers . . . he shall remain outside for a few days, at the door, and be taught the Lord's prayer and as many psalms as he can learn. (49)

15. Whoever has come into the monastery uninstructed shall first be taught what he must observe, and when so [in]formed, he has agreed to it all, they shall give him twenty psalms, or two of the Apostle's epistles, or some other part of scripture. And if he is illiterate he shall, at the first, third and ninth hours go to the teacher so delegated and stand before him; and shall learn with the greatest of eagerness and gratitude. Afterwards the fundamentals of syllable, verb, and noun shall be written out for him, and even if unwilling he shall be compelled to read. (139)

No one whosoever shall be in the monastery who does not learn to read. . . . (140)

16. Tape 2 morning.

17. Tape 2 evening.

18. Father Veilleux makes this statement joining obedience, love and God's indwelling presence on tape 3, evening. The bread making incident is related in this connection on the same tape.

19. Life, para. 89.

THE VENERABLE MOTHER SISTER BLANCHE OF PROUILLE

First Prioress of the Monastery of San Sisto

(Account in the CHRONICLES OF THE MONASTERY OF SAN SISTO
by Sister Salomonía, chronicler c. 1652, translated
from the Italian into French by J.J. Berthier, O.P.)

When, in obedience to the orders of the Sovereign Pontiff, St. Dominic had reunited the religious of Rome at San Sisto under the rule and habit of his Order, he took care to instruct all of these religious. For this purpose he sent eight religious from Prouille to Rome who were already instructed and well apt to govern and to teach others. It was he himself who had thus formed them to direct and excellently edify their numerous daughters in the service of the Lord.

Among these venerable Mothers, he had chosen as Prioress of the new Monastery of San Sisto, Sister Blanche. As a proof of her virtue and of her holiness, it will suffice to consider that St. Dominic made her Superior to guide a community which was to be the nursery and the source of edification of all the others.

Father Benedetto, Prior of San Sisto, tells us of some details of Sister Blanche:

She lived about forty years after the death of the Holy Patriarch and during her life and after her death he was always firmly convinced of her holiness, as well as that of the three companions who remained with her.

Four of these eight returned to Prouille.¹

Sister Blanche imitated the patriarch Abraham. He showed his love and his obedience towards God above all in two circumstances. The first was when he left his house and his country at the command of the Lord and went to a strange land. Then in order to obey he accepted the sacrifice of his only son. God recompensed this double generosity and gave him in this life a new fatherland, greater riches, and a more numerous family. After his death He placed in his bosom the souls of the just who awaited in Limbo the possession of God.

In Sister Blanche these two acts are similarly found, of love and obedience. She left her fatherland and the company of these holy religious of Prouille and set out for Rome at the order of St. Dominic, who wished to introduce her to San Sisto. There she showed herself disposed to sacrifice her body for the love of God. Her numerous and rough penances could have shortened her life. God conserved it for her.

¹Father Percin gives us this historical background about Sister Blanche. The Blessed Father in 1219 called from Prouille to Rome, Sister Blanche with seven other sisters for the formation of religious, who, under the order of Honorius III the Patriarch Dominic had reunited in the Monastery of San Sisto. After some time four of them returned to Prouille - Sister Blanche with three of her companions remained in Rome. According to the documents of Prouille, Sister Blanche was born at Toulouse and had married a noble person of the country; then both of them made profession in the order and they gave their goods to the Monastery of Prouille where they helped with the construction of half the dormitory. (Mon. Conv. tolos.)

St. Dominic had called these religious from Prouille for a double purpose: to instruct San Sisto in what had already been in practice in Prouille, and to report to Prouille what had been established for San Sisto after experience and better arrangements.

For these two acts of fidelity, she gained for herself like Abraham, great spiritual riches and a numerous posterity which went forth to the whole world by all these monasteries which recognize her as their mother.

The second recompense was that in her bosom, that is to say under her government and protection, God placed the souls of many young girls, who, dead to the world by their abandonment, shut themselves up in the Limbo of the Monastery, where they had but one pain - the suffering which accompanies the ardent desire to see God. The true religious does not experience sensible pains. In Limbo one is sure not to be damned. In the Monastery one equally has all the security that one is able to have here on earth.

The humble religious recognized such benefits and regarded herself as unworthy of the office that St. Dominic had confided to her. She worked very hard with her companions to plant this vine which was to produce abundant fruit. By her example, her words, her works, she helped her posterity greatly.

After a fatiguing and laborious life she was called by the Master of the vineyard to receive the merited recompense which she enjoys forever.

THE SEVEN COMPANIONS OF SISTER BLANCHE I have not been able to find the names or the notices of the seven companions of Sister Blanche who were called to Rome with her. I have written insistently to Prouille to retrieve them. I will content myself to transcribe what Father Benedetto has written on this subject.

The Blessed Dominic, in order to form the religious of San Sisto, called from the monastery of Prouille which he had established, Sister Blanche with seven other religious, four of whom after some time returned to their convent. Sister Blanche remained with three others at San Sisto to the end. St. Dominic had made her Prioress. She it is who taught the sisters the observances of the Order and in particular taught them to speak by signs of the hand.²

All these communities when finally united under the government of the worthy Prioress, Sister Blanche, were peopled with numerous young Roman girls who were very pious and devoted women and who begged St. Dominic for admission to the new monastery and to the reception of the habit. They were listened to, received, and welcomed with goodness and admitted into the family of the holy Patriarch. They were the object of a totally special affection as the first fruits of the family and because often they had escaped from the enemy of their salvation, turning from the way of vanity to that of truth.

²Sister Salomonía cites the text in Latin. "B. Dominicus ad informationem dictarum monialium vocavit de monasterio de Prulliano, quod ipse aedificaverat, sororem Blancam, cum septem aliis monialibus, quarum quatuor post aliquod tempus ad supradictum monasterium redierunt. Praedicta vero soror Blanca cum aliis tribus usque in finem remansit in monasterio Sancti Sisti, ubi eam B. Dominicus Priorissam instituit. Quod praefatas moniales de Ordinis observantia docuit, loqui per signum indicavit." (Of Sr. Salomonía it is said in the CHRONICLES: "She knew her Latin perfectly and cites Scripture and the Fathers in the language of the Church.")

* * * * *

From this same translation of Father Berthier, Sister Mary Regina also translated the comments preceding St. Dominic's letter to the nuns at Madrid, and those preceding the Primitive Constitutions of San Sisto. Some of these comments follow here:

At Prouille, he (St. Dominic) had indicated his thought; its echo is found in his letter to the Dominicans recently established in Madrid. . . . (Letter to the Nuns)

These are already the ideas that we will see developed in the Primitive Constitutions, which give a more complete interpretation to the thought of St. Dominic. These Constitutions were developed later, always however in the same spirit, even when the first form had more or less been abandoned. . . .

If it is true that he sent some religious from Prouille to inaugurate San Sisto and to carry the first usages there, it is also true that his thought was that some ought to return from San Sisto to Prouille, in order to introduce the definitive established organization of San Sisto to Prouille. These are the same Constitutions that Sister Cecilia, the Roman, carried to Bologna.

BEATIFICATION OF MARGARET EBNER, O.P.
German Nun of the Fourteenth Century

(Account in the ANALECTA of the Order
of Friars Preachers, January-April 1979)

From the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints

1 - Beatification of the Servant of God, Margaret Ebner, O.P.

In 1978, on the 9th of May and the 7th of November, there was a session of the theological consultors and meeting of the Cardinals regarding the cause of the equipollent beatification of this nun of the Order of Friars Preachers.

Moreover, on February 24th, 1979, John Paul II confirmed the cult given from time immemorial to the same Servant of God and acknowledged her virtues, so that Margaret Ebner is to be regarded as "equipollently beatified" (cf. Can. 2134) and "acts of public cult can be permitted" (cf. Can. 2135).

Concerning all these things the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints prepared a Decretum, which is to be published in the next issue of the ANALECTA.

This is a short summary of the life of our Blessed, who is a beautiful exemplar of the mystical-contemplative life, for which 74 monasteries of the Order in Germany were distinguished in the 14th century. She lived in Bavaria, now belonging to the Province of Upper Germany and Austria.

a) Synopsis of life

- 1291 - Born in village of Donauworth, in diocese of Vindelicorum (Augsburg).
- 1306 - Begins religious life in monastery called Maria-Medingen in Bavaria.
- 1312 - Afflicted with grave illness for three years.
- 1324 - Because of wartime conditions returns to her family home.
- 1325 - Returns to her monastery, where she exercises the office of bursar.
- 1332 - Begins an exchange of letters on the spiritual life with a priest, Henry Nordlingen.
- 1342 - Stricken with another severe illness.
- 1346 - Profited from the writing and visits of John Tauler.
- 1351 - On June 20th dies in peace of Christ in village of Medingen.

b) Principal Mystical Graces

- 1311 - Interior reminder concerning full conversion to divine will.
- 1335 - Impression of the most holy name of Jesus.
- 1338 - Singular sharing in the passion of Christ during Lent.
- 1347 - Spiritual marriage.

c) Mystical Writings

- 1. Spiritual Diary or Revelations (1311-1348); her autobiography begun in year 1344.
- 2. Prayer called "Our Father."
- 3. Letters

d) Bibliography

Sacred Congregation of Rites, B. Margaret Ebner, Position on case taken up, 1963, pp. 274-288, with 329 indications (prepared by Fr. Angelo Walz, O.P.).

S. Ringler, Marguerite Ebner in DS (Dictionnaire de Spiritualite) 10, 340.

End of ANALECTA account.

For further information on Margaret Ebner, see also I D I, May 25, 1979.

She is mentioned in the following books which indicate her place in the history of spirituality, as well as that of the "Friends of God" movement to which she belonged:

- 1) THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE MIDDLE AGES by J. Leclercq, F. Vandenbroucke, L. Bouyer
Part Two, by Dom Vandenbroucke, Chapter VI, "German Spirituality in the Fourteenth Century," in section on the Rhineland School, pp. 395-7.
- 2) MYSTICISM by Evelyn Underhill
Appendix - Historical sketch of European mysticism, pp. 464-5.

SUCH A WOMAN . . . SUCH A SAINT!

Report on a Community Study
of St. Catherine's DIALOGUE

"How does man approach God?" Perhaps this is the burning question of contemporary religious searchings. And yet, for St. Catherine of Siena, the real question was, "How does God approach man?" In her DIALOGUE she offers a rich variety of answers.

Our Community study of the DIALOGUE last year was only a skimming introduction. Rather than follow a chapter by chapter exposition, we proposed a series of questions, provided study guides, and then met for lecture and discussion. This seemed to stimulate greater participation by all. In response to Sr. Mary Catherine's kind invitation (in Conference Communications), we enclose a snippet from last year's work. We hope the chapter references will help, should you wish to study more deeply what we can only sketch here.

Since one of the basic questions in all religions and at all times concerns the ways in which God manifests Himself, we tried to see what St. Catherine had to say on that subject. Her doctrine has characteristics distinctly her own, but you will easily recognize that it fits in with the general development of the whole Christian tradition concerning the ascetical and mystical life.

St. Catherine used a strong image to put her ideas across: the BRIDGE which leads to the knowledge and love of the Blessed Trinity, and by which the Trinity manifests Itself, is the BODY OF CHRIST. One approaches this Bridge by mounting THREE STEPS:

FIRST STEP: Servile Fear. This fear is not sufficient for salvation according to St. Catherine since it is concerned totally with the fear of punishment. Yet, it is at this step that the "first gathering together of the powers of the soul" takes place. The MEMORY recollects its vicious acts. The INTELLECT sees the punishment due to sin; and the WILL hates the faults it discovers because of the punishment they deserve. When this futile Servile Fear is infused with the least degree of charity, it becomes a form of imperfect contrition which can be sufficient for salvation, although it is still very far from the fullness of Christian Love. St. Catherine calls this beginning state the "embrace of Christ's Feet".

SECOND STEP: Mercenary Love. This is true but imperfect charity. It is a necessary stage of growth for one who would develop a deep love of God and neighbor, yet it co-exists with many imperfections. This love, as its name indicates, seeks one's own profit, delight and consolation more than the Lover. It prefers the gift to the Giver. But with an overwhelmingly loving pedagogy, God grants repeated experiences of His Presence and then of His Withdrawal, and in this way teaches one how to purify the heart that it may be ready for truer, deeper love. St. Catherine offers several signs of this imperfect mercenary love, but basically they can be reduced to the fact that love for God grows weak when He withdraws His consolations and love for neighbor is insufficient and of short duration. Impatience is a frequent failing. For St. Catherine, all the fruits of this imperfect love are rooted in spiritual self-love. If one does not struggle valiantly to overcome these failings, and to move toward the genuine LOVE OF FRIENDSHIP, God will cease to manifest Himself.

LOVE OF FRIENDSHIP. Still at the Second Step of the Bridge, one who attains to the Love of Friendship has reached what St. Catherine calls the SECRET OF THE HEART. In this state of charity, God manifests Himself "according to the will and desire of the

soul." She writes, "...Looking at myself in You, I saw myself to be your image, my life being given me by your POWER, Eternal Father, and your WISDOM, which belongs to your Only-Begotten Son, shining in my intellect, and my will, ONE WITH YOUR HOLY SPIRIT Who proceeds from You and your Son, by whom I am able to love You." This is clearly a Trinitarian mode of love, and a marvel of grace! Yet, it is not yet PERFECT FILIAL LOVE.

THIRD STEP: Filial Love. Here, in a state which St. Catherine calls the "Kiss of the mouth", the soul habitually tastes God in the union of charity and is constantly serving charity in her neighbor. At these heights, PATIENCE is unalterable because sensuality has been destroyed. "Queen Patience rules over all the virtues because she is the mirror of charity..." One who has attained such a degree of charity is completely and habitually ruled by the Holy Spirit, present with the Father and the Son, and ever calling the soul to greater love of neighbor. St. Catherine describes this Third Step as follows: "Now this death of the sensitive will, after the soul has eaten of the affection of my charity, is the sign by which it is known that the soul has arrived at the Third Step, that is, the mouth. And in the mouth she found peace and quiet, and nothing can disturb her peace and quiet because her sensitive will is dead. They who have arrived at this step bring forth the virtues upon their neighbor without pain, not because pain is no longer painful to them, but because their sensitive will being dead, they voluntarily bear pain for my sake. They run without negligence, by the doctrine of Christ crucified, and slacken not their pace on account of persecutions, injuries or pleasure of the world. They pass by all these with fortitude and perseverance, their affection clothed in the affection of charity, and eating the food of souls with true and perfect love, loving without any consideration of self...caring only for the glory and praise of my Name." Later mystics will refer to this state of prayer as the Transforming Union, but already St. Catherine had described its characteristic features. She does speak of a FOURTH STEP of the Bridge, which is the "FRUIT" of Filial Love. But she also notes that it is not truly distinct from Filial Love itself. Rather, it is the ultimate degree of that love possible in this life, and is marked by a consuming desire to suffer in union with Christ Crucified. And in such a sublime state, the soul never loses consciousness of its union with God.

Certainly we find in St. Catherine's teaching a lofty expression of the Indwelling Mystery. But one would miss the point of her doctrine unless it be stressed that it is God Himself who conducts this "pedagogy of the Spirit", all the while demanding the full cooperation of the human person. "You, Eternal Trinity, are my creator, and I am the work of your hands. And I know through the new creation you have given me in the Blood of your Son that you are enamored of the beauty of your workmanship... You are the fire ever burning without being consumed...You consume in your heat all the soul's self-love." It is the Loving-kindness of the Holy Spirit which grounds the soul in all the virtues, and stimulates the "prayer of holy desire and self-knowledge." The pattern of Presence and Withdrawal continues until one is ready to cut down to the very root of self-love, and the final "cut" destroys spiritual self-love, most insidious of all charity's foes. If charity is manifested by Patience on the soul's part, it is even more profoundly manifested as a work of Patience on God's side. The destruction of self-love does not mean annihilation. It refers to the uprooting of disorientated egotism, and thus, clears the way for the full development of the person in grace and nature. There is always room in Christianity for the virtuous love of one's own person, created in the image and likeness of God and made for ultimate union with Him. And no one was more convinced of that truth than St. Catherine in her own sublime experiences of what divine charity means in the life of a human person wholly united to God. "I am in the soul to the degree of perfection which she seeks in Me." God grant us all a superabundant share in that "grace of seeking"!

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER STUDY: All from the DIALOGUE.
Doctrine of the Bridge:

Its Three Steps: chapters 21 - 22

Explanation of Bridge: chapters 26 - 30

Three Steps and Three Powers of Soul: chapters 50 - 55

States of the Soul: chapters 56 - 87.

BOOK REVIEW

LOVING AWARENESS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

by
Fabio Giardini, O.P.

I have been asked by the editor of this collection to write a review of the book Loving Awareness of the Presence of God by Fr. Fabio Giardini, O.P. (Alba House) in lieu of an eighteen page outline-synopsis of the book. Given its considerable length, I certainly do not blame the editor for hesitating to reproduce it with this collection, and such was not my original intent in writing it. A word of explanation might be of interest.

Father Giardini had asked and received permission for one of our sisters to work with him on correcting and perfecting the English text for the book, and I somehow became a sort of "second reader". As I read it, the fine mind of this Dominican, and the clarity with which he presented his points and maintained them throughout the work appealed to me. Likewise, the fact that the book, with its theme text from Ephesians: "God chose us in Christ to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in His presence"* seemed to complement very well the course on Christian perfection that I was presenting in the novitiate at the time (also under the same scripture text), galvanized my usually unambitious self into doing the synopsis.

There is a plethora of books on prayer today, one to fit every personality and need, it seems. This book is not one of the "Instant prayer" varieties that one might like to consume along with one's instant coffee..the "How to Pray in Ten Easy Lessons" type. It is a rather low-keyed, intellectual approach to prayer that concentrates more on the "quiddity", the WHAT-is-it"ness of the question of prayer rather than on specific types and techniques (though these are also treated).

Father's basic definition of prayer as a loving awareness of God's presence is, it seems to me, a definite advantage over the more popular presentation of it as a "dialogue" - an ideal which can prove somewhat disconcerting to the eager beginner as the "dialogue", understood too literally, can seem to be petering out into a dull "monologue". "Conversation", in Father's thought, becomes but one of three elements in prayer; the other two being "exercise", i.e., man's effort to dispose himself for this loving encounter, and "experience", i.e., God's free gift of His presence to man.

Having given a definition of prayer that can be applied to any person of good will, Father is careful to point out that, for the Christian, this encounter with the Father must necessarily be in and through Christ. He then devotes a considerable portion of the book to an exposition of the biblical theme of God's presence throughout Salvation History, explicating its essential structure, the main realms which it permeates and its most salient features. He points out how the revelation of God's presence in scripture develops from a fleeting, localized encounter with

*Ephesians 1:4

a special, privileged individual to a more permanent, personalized presence open to any soul which truly seeks Him. Then, in masterly fashion, Father shows how the many and various "presences" of God in the Old Testament, e.g., the cloud, the tent, the temple, are marvelously summed up and incarnated in Jesus Christ, and prolonged sacramentally and liturgically in the Church.

The second major section of the book is an attempt to demonstrate how prayer answers man's most basic psychological needs which he characterizes as: the need for true meaning in one's life, the need for worthwhile goals, and the need for loving companionship; he then ably connects these three needs with the three Persons of the Trinity and the three Theological virtues. He also points out that the very attitudes of mind and heart which are needed for authentic prayer are being systematically smothered in modern man by the technocratic society in which he lives.

The various forms of prayer today are treated under two main categories: private or personal, and public, i.e., shared, communal, liturgical; and the advantages and disadvantages of each are pointed out. The ever-present danger for public prayer, for example, is formalism, while personal prayer can tend to be too subjective, with the tendency, in some cases, of wishing to by-pass the preparatory "exercise" in order to attain to an immediate "experience" of God. Too much self-seeking in prayer can also result in prayer bearing little practical fruit in the other areas of Christian life. With keen insight into human nature, Father points out a two-fold fear lurking in man's heart that can hamper his relations with God: the fear of not being loved enough by God (i.e., of not being lovable), and, paradoxically, the fear of being loved too much (with too demanding and possessive a love).

In conclusion: this book would seem to be an excellent aid in establishing a solid foundation for a life of prayer.

In reply to the editor's inquiry: we have enough extra copies of the synopsis of the book to be able to send one copy to any monastery requesting it.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF STUDY TO OUR DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

"For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there til they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it." (Is. 55:10-11)

We pray to be wise women who build our houses on the rock of the Word (Mt. 7:24) and to realize that in accepting the call to our Dominican Contemplative Communities within the Church we share in the ministry of that Word and in the priestly ministry of service to our fellow sisters and indeed to all God's people. It seems to me that this response of ours is a whole and integrated one, a life which is made up of four interdependent parts converging in the Spirit's gift of prayer. This four-in-one is namely: studying to know God, listening to and simply being with God in lectio divina and solitary prayer, praising him with his own words in liturgical prayer, and doing his work by living and sharing in community fellowship. Through our day to day life-time fidelity we build up the Body of Christ, witnessing to the importance of transcendent values, offering a sign of hope to our world and pointing the way to our Father.

In this short article we shall try to focus upon one aspect of our prayer life, namely the relationship of study to prayer. It is my firm belief that study* nourishes our minds, tempers our bodies, strengthens our wills with its discipline, opens our hearts, fosters maturity, and helps us fulfill the gospel counsels with more fidelity. In short, it prepares our total being for intimate knowledge of God. The word "knowledge" is used with all the beauty and mystery of the biblical covenant concept: responding to our God in faithful love and obedience because we have first experienced his love in our own hearts. (1 Jn. 4:10)

Study has been part of our Dominican tradition from the times of Sts. Dominic, Thomas, Albert, Catherine, etc. In his plan for the Order Dominic thought it so important that he included study as an essential element, raising it to the status of a religious duty and placing it at the side of prayer. (#34 of the Primitive Constitutions of the Nuns and present Constitutions #106 and #110,3) Dominic realized that "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" and therefore he pondered that Word and communicated it to his brethren and indeed to all he met. (Dt. 8:3)

Study for us Dominican Nuns is therefore a reflective internalization of the truth and beauty we encounter in our daily experiences with God and creation. We have been annointed with the truth, (1 Jn. 2:27) and all depends on our truth. A French nun explicates the idea beautifully: "the truth of our life, founded on the truth of our prayer, expressed by the truth of our fraternal life, by the seriousness of our confrontation with the Word, by the sincerity of our material simplicity, the reality of our labor and by the authenticity of our unity, joy, and freedom." We must listen respectfully to the living tradition of the Church and the Order which have urged us to

* I define study as: Considering things deeply, reading in close detail with the intent of learning, and more appropriately for us, absorbing what is studied into our very being and living, thus acquiring a holy knowledge filled with Truth.

pursue the intellectual virtues, to face the demands of the discipline of study as a help for a more fruitful prayer life and within it confront the Truth, who is Wisdom Incarnate. In speaking of discipline the famous writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn says that discipline is above all discipline of the soul. The best discipline, says Solzhenitsyn, comes not through reason or scientific constructs, but through the "irrational." Therefore he believes man can give nothing more dear than the discipline of his soul. To me these words seem to catch something of the Gospel message, the Gospel paradox, and therefore the truth of Jesus and of kingdom life. All sacred studies are therefore not a luxury for us but a life long necessary duty and responsibility. It might prove helpful to read what St. Thomas says in the Summa about study and the intellectual virtues with regard to the pursuit of Wisdom. (Q.166 art.1,2 Pt.II-II)

The Church teaches that "Scripture is the heart and soul of all Theology." (De Revelatione) Therefore all of our sacred study is grounded in the Word of God. With this in mind the major portion of this article will center attention on biblical studies, but not to the exclusion of other areas that are also necessary for our prayer life. Monastic History, Theology, and the study of the History of Liturgy are also very important. In fact, it is in the liturgy that the mystery of our salvation is made present and actual. "The Word speaks to us during Eucharist in the word and in sacred action. Since it is for the assembly that the Bible came into existence, it is within it that the Word remains heard and received as the object of the response it demanded, of praise, supplication, and sacrificial service." (The Eternal Son, Louis Bouyer, p. 59)

The history of Christianity demonstrates the esteem in which the Scriptures are held in the early Church. The early founders of monasticism and the fathers of the Church encourage us to follow the Lord and to experience what we hear or read in the Scriptures. A few samples of their thought follow:

- Anthony - Responded to God's Word (Mt. 19:21) by doing exactly what he heard.
- Pachomius - "The Word of God is your way of Life."
- Benedict - "Scripture is the surest norm for human living."
- Bernard - "Apply your inner hearing, the eyes of your heart, to contemplating the mysteries of Jesus."

Gregory the Great - "Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God."

It might be worthwhile to take a quick look at a few of the Church pronouncements on Sacred Scripture in order to have some guidance as to the things we can study to help know the Scriptures better so we can live them more faithfully. De Revelatione tells us "we must investigate the intention of the sacred writer and one way to do this is by paying attention to the literary form employed by the writer" (how he writes). The Pontifical Biblical Commission decree on the Historicity of the Gospel reiterates the instructions of Divino Afflante Spiritu, and stresses the concept of different literary forms saying that Bible readers and interpreters "should pay attention to the three stages by which the doctrine and life of Jesus have come down to us, namely, the Jesus life-time stage, the apostolic stage, and the sacred authors' stage." We must be aware that "from the many sayings, miracles, and other stories handed down, the sacred writers, especially the Evangelists, selected, reduced to synthesis, and explicated." Indeed they were true pastors, trying to meet the needs of their local churches and they sometimes used Christ's sayings not literally but differently. The context in which they placed a saying, story, or miracle can change the meaning and challenge the Christians to meet Jesus anew in their own times with its unique problems and to know who he is for men. Spiritus Paraclitus states that the "goal of biblical studies is to

learn spiritual perfection, to arm oneself with the sound doctrine of faith and to preach the Word of God fruitfully."

As Dominican Nuns we preach the Word by our lives of total commitment, a response to the initiative of God's covenant love offering. We should not be afraid of study or think we are not able to do so with our limited capabilities or that we can not afford to put aside some of the leisure time that study demands. I think Father Raymond Brown supplies some encouragement and a good standard that each of us may apply to all sacred study. He states that in order to read the Bible with appreciation and savor, a man's biblical education should be proportionate to his general education. I believe he is saying, do what you are capable of doing, but by all means do some studying. There are so many kinds of commentaries available now, that there is something somewhere for everyone, and what is suitable for each of us, is a grace generously offered and generously to be accepted.

Deeply rooted in the monastic tradition, and in our own Dominican tradition, our lives are necessarily centered around the Word of God, our first rule of life. We are called to be attentive always, to be daughters of the Word, hearing God where he speaks. (Is. 50:4,5) Seven times a day we listen to it in choral prayer. Certainly, the study that Dominic set at the side of prayer must be part of the rhythm of our lives as we seek Wisdom. The Wisdom of the Scriptures was the Wisdom Dominic found, that Word which "grows" to the degree that it is understood and lived. This Wisdom is inexhaustible; it is God's Christ, our virtue, holiness and freedom. (1 Cor. 1:30)

Father Raymond Brown believes it is a common fallacy to think that everyone should be able to pick up the Bible and read it profitably without preparation or study. True, there are considerable portions of Scripture which are easily intelligible, and, of course, spiritual solace, insight, and religious depths can always be drawn from the Bible without technical knowledge. Nevertheless, when we desire to find out what the human author was trying to tell us about God, Christ, man, or the world (and therefore what God inspired), there is no substitute for study. This study will be most beneficial if it is consistent and as organized as possible in our individual situations. By this I mean that it is most helpful to start with very broad, general things, for instance, a survey of the New Testament and its times, how and why the authors wrote the way they wrote, and then, very gradually work our way into specific studies such as St. Matthew's Gospel, then more specifically and much later, the Sermon on the Mount. It can make things seem much more difficult to try to read something as specialized as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount without having some other necessary background. However, each person must honestly appraise what she can do, and what seems most helpful to her at a given time. Trial and error are wonderful steps in the learning process. Some of our sisters find it most helpful to spend time each day with various commentaries on the daily gospel and believe their lives are enriched by this sacred reading.

I would like to share with you, some of the personal beliefs and experiences which my fellow sisters have communicated to me regarding the relationship of study to their prayer life.

One sister says that as a result of a challenge to read the whole Bible offered to her some sixteen years ago, she has spent an hour each day since, faithfully studying scripture with the commentaries and other good books available in our library. She believes that she no longer prays from pietistic sentimentality, but with deep conviction born from a realization of God's love, and as a fruit of allowing the Word to soak into her inmost being. It has helped her grow humanly, as well as spiritually, being open and more receptive to all that is alive and good.

Another sister has found that study has assisted her to be more open to the fruits of the Spirit working in the lives of others, and to come into closer contact with the Reality of the Word.

One of our senior citizens relates: "I am aware of an interior change in my Bible reading as a result of study. The inspired Word was there, but sterile, in the past. Now, liturgy, especially Eucharist, and solitary prayer, are alive and more meaningful. I find answers to so many problems, temptations, too, as I ponder the Sacred Scriptures. St. Dominic was always speaking to God or about God among the brethren; this, I am more conscious of doing myself and I find it more prevalent in our community."

Several sisters are doing some rewarding historical study. One is engrossed in a History of the Jews which she believes is filling her with a good background for understanding Jesus, the Chosen One as the fulfillment of all Old Testament promises. A couple of other sisters are studying the History of the Liturgical Hours and the History of Eucharist. They have noticed a transformation in the way they celebrate, in the eagerness, "kawanah" (adherence of heart), plenitude, and harmony that permeates their prayer life. They truly recognize the wonderful works of God in a progressively unfolding clarification of insight. They experience Eucharist as initiating them more fully into the mysteries of God's fidelity to Himself and as a pledge of his faithfulness to his people, so that they may, in turn, re-present it to him as the homage of their faith.

In the article "Truth and the Future of Contemplatives," Father Yves M.J. Congar, O.P. supports the tradition of *lectio divina* as the fundamental occupation of the contemplative, and he sees it as something very different from the study of the scholar. He says that he owes to the liturgy lived according to its annual cycle, the better half of what he has been able to understand of the Christian mysteries. That is a statement worth pondering.

Another sister here has a favorite quotation that seems to summarize what she believes is the relationship of study to her prayer life, "Man's love is a quest, God's love is a bequest." Study helps bring charity and infinite richness to her gift of faith.

God uses many means to bring the fullness of Himself into someone's life. Having had the opportunity to study the arts and humanities before entering the monastery, one of our sisters is able to see that the development of those learning skills and the use of the creative imagination have heightened within her a sensitive awareness, an awe and reverence, and a zealotry for the Beautiful, which is so valuable in a life of listening love.

I have personally found that study stretches my understanding, gives me a sense of being closer to all that is real, closer to Truth Incarnate, and thus drawn more intimately into something of his own 'Abba' experience. It helps me be more aware of and convinced in faith that I am in a continual state of prayer because of the presence of God's Spirit, who at times invades my consciousness and assists me to dip into his life-current going on in the depths of my being. In other words, I believe study feeds my prayer life. It shows me how daily metanoia is part and parcel of kingdom living. It enlightens my understanding, helping me participate more fully in liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharist. I find my everydayness reorientated, affirmed, illuminated, challenged, hope-filled, and gifted. Hoping to be Christed anew each day, I realize that my failures, like those of Christ, are not the last word; in fact, even in complete fiascos, I continue to trust God. He alone is the

Last Word, the Omega. (Rev. 21:6) I continue to ask, to seek, to knock, firmly believing that I will receive, find, and enter more deeply into the mystery of God found in the pure and perennial source of my spiritual life - the Scriptures.

I believe all of us have discovered the familiar and the unfamiliar in juxtaposition in our study, and, indeed, in our whole prayer life. We are teased, stimulated, provoked, strengthened, and caught up to the Ultimate-Intimate One. The commonplace of our lives is penetrated so that it becomes for us uncommonly significant. God raises us outside of ourselves and brings us to a unique adoration of Himself, consisting of two essential moments: hearing and welcoming the Word, and loving service. Our whole existence is centered in God, who frees us from whatever prevents us from perceiving life as gift, and life as promise.

Let me close with a statement made by Dr. Smiley Blanton, Director of the American Foundation of Religion and Psychiatry, who was once asked about reading the Bible. He replied: "I not only read it I study it.... It is the greatest text book on human behavior ever written. If people would only absorb its message.... How foolish it is not to make use of the distilled wisdom of 3000 years."

"If you live by my Word, you are truly my disciples." (Jn. 8:31)

The paper on study ends here.

DOMINIC AT PRAYER

He prayed always: during
office, at Mass, on the road,
in the woods, wherever they
visited on their journeys. . . .

It was always Jesus Our Savior
he spoke to, before the altar or
the crucifix which he loved to
visit. . . .

--M.-H. Vicaire

He prayed without ceasing.
. . . God gave him the singular
gift of weeping for sinners,
the wretched, and the afflicted,
whose sufferings he felt within
his compassionate heart. . . .

--Jordan of Saxony

Then he would read, letting
the sweetness of what he read
touch his mind, as if he heard
the Lord actually speaking to him--
as it says in the Psalm: "I will
hear what the Lord God is saying
in me. . . ."

. . . passing from reading to
prayer, from prayer to meditation,
from meditation to contemplation. . . .

--From NINE WAYS OF PRAYER
OF SAINT DOMINIC



--By Fra Angelico

APPROACHES TO OUR CHARISM

II. STUDY: A HERITAGE RE-GAINED

"To a brother who asked him if it was more useful to pray or to study Sacred Scripture, Blessed Jordan of Saxony replied: 'Which is better, to eat or to drink? Both are needful, but eat at the proper time'." Gerard de Frachet, Vitae Fratrum.

In this second part of our paper, we have turned to the subject of Study. We did not place it after Structures to imply that Study is more important than the Liturgy or private prayer. Our intention is to highlight an area which has been neglected in some centuries of our history, but which, thanks to the impetus of the Holy Spirit and the directives of authority, is once again resuming its rightful place among us.

If we wish to get a realistic hold on this question, we have to look at the historical documents which are available. The first in importance is the "Primitive Constitutions of San Sisto," edited by St. Dominic himself. These Constitutions were probably drawn up during the winter of 1220-1221, while St. Dominic was preparing for the foundation of the new monastery of San Sisto. He adapted the laws in force at Prouille since 1218 to the needs of his new community. Subsequently, this text was also adopted at Prouille.¹

THE NUNS' CONSTITUTIONS

Chapter XX of the "Institutions of Saint Sixtus" reads:

"So with the exception of the hours which the Sisters ought to consecrate to prayer, to reading, to the preparation of the Office or the chant, or to study, they should devote themselves to some manual labor as shall be judged good by the Prioress."²

A few notes about this text: "prayer," "reading" and "study" are all conceived as different exercises. The words which have come to us from the French edition of the San Sisto Constitutions are "l'etude des lettres" for "study." In our present Latin edition of the Constitutions, this quotation from the San Sisto document renders "study" as "eruditioni litterarum." And the order of importance among these means is clearly indicated in the text itself.

In 1259, Bl. Humbert of the Romans was faced with the problem of reducing to some kind of unity (not uniformity) the many variants of the Constitutions then in practise. The Chapter presided over by Bl. Humbert imposed a new draft of the San Sisto Constitutions upon all Nuns of the Order. This draft represented an effort to bring the Nuns' Constitutions into greater conformity with those of the Brethren. Chapter XX of the San Sisto Constitutions has now become Chapter XXVII, and the wording of the text has varied:

"Except for the times when they are engaged in prayer or the Office, or other necessary occupations, all should diligently apply themselves with attention to performing some manual labor for the common good, according to the orders which they have received."³

The original priority is still there, but not as clearly as in St. Dominic's text. Bl. Humbert's Constitutions do recognize that there are "other necessary occupations" which take rank after Office and prayer, etc., deserving attention before manual labor. In this new wording, perhaps the attitude of the Chapter was not unlike that of St. Benedict. In formulating his Rule, he did not legislate for Study; but he presupposed it's importance. He expected his monks and nuns to be able to read, write and "meditate" the Sacred texts - with all the force that the word "meditare" had in those times. And this exercise of "meditatio," a part of "lectio," was not to be identified with "study" or "grammatica," as it was then termed.

Bl. Humbert's Constitutions remained in force until 1892, when Fr. Jandel brought out a new edition. Under the title of "Constitutions of the Sisters of the Order of St. Dominic," edited and commented upon by Rev. Fr. M. A. Potton, O.P., we find that Chapter XXVII of the 1259 Constitutions is now Chapter XXIII. The text reads as follows in the English edition:

"Except during the hours given to prayer, to the Office, or to any other necessary occupation, all should apply themselves with zeal to perform some manual labor for the common utility and according to the orders which they will receive."⁴

The conciseness and clarity of St. Dominic's text has not been fully restored, and it is possible to note a subtle change of emphasis, placing manual labor in a position of greater importance than was accorded it in the beginning. We could wish, looking back at this text, that the Nuns had been encouraged to pursue Reading and Study with a zeal not less attentive than what they were to bring to manual labor.

The Very Rev. Fr. Martin S. Gillet was well aware of the direction in which the doctrinal heritage of the Nuns had moved. In 1930, he published another edition of our Constitutions in order to bring them into line with changes in the Code of Canon Law. The text we have been considering now appears as Chapter XX:

"Except at the hours and times in which they must be engaged in prayer, the Office or other necessary employment, all, with the exception of those officials who may have been dispensed because of the duties of their charge, should attentively devote themselves as indicated in the Monastery Horarium to manual works for the common utility, and this even in the Novitiate."⁵

This text introduces the concept of dispensations with respect to manual labor, but does not basically change the original priorities. In other respects, it is very close to Bl. Humbert's text. We might have wished that Fr. Gillet had returned to the San Sisto wording, but he made it fully clear in two different Encyclical Letters to the Nuns that he wished St. Dominic's original legislation to be restored. Perhaps no General of modern times has done more for the Nuns of the Order than he did when he re-introduced the "priorities" in our life. With words that could well be incorporated into an Introduction to our new Constitutions, Fr. Gillet taught:

"A religious of a contemplative Community has therefore entered therein for two ends: the one general, which consists in perfecting charity in herself; the other particular or specific, which obliges her to consecrate herself specially to contemplation.

"All the rest, that is, all the organized exercises by which one advances to this two-fold end, enters into the category of means of realization, and also distinguishes the different religious families vowed by reason of state to contemplation. Thus the Dominican contemplatives have at their disposal three great means of realizing their vocation, namely: a) the choral reci-

tation of the Divine Office; b) the assiduous study of Christian doctrine; and c) the monastic observances. These three means, whatever may be their respective value, cannot in practice be separated from one another. It is this harmonious union which assures their full efficacy in view of contemplation.... If faith is infused, the truths to be believed are not. These truths, to be received into the intellect and assimilated with it, have to be learned...."⁶

And lest there remain any confusion about the matter, Fr. Gillet remarks toward the end of his Letter,

"The Divine Office, study of sacred doctrine, monastic observances: One now sees the relation between these three traditional means of Dominican life with contemplation, and the order of their importance. Far from the monastic observances being the end of Dominican life, they have with contemplation proper only a rather remote relationship."⁷

Father Gillet's Encyclicals were published in 1930 and 1931 - almost fifty years ago. Yet, what a solid preparation they are for the texts we now have as Chapter 3, "Keeping and Hearing the Word of God" in our new Constitutions.

WHAT DOES THE WORD "STUDY" MEAN IN DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE?

If St. Dominic attached so much importance to "l'etude des lettres" when he wrote the Nuns' Constitutions, it is important to try to discover what the notion meant in his day. And it is at this point that our heritage links up directly with the great Benedictine-Cistercian line. (Cardinal Paul Philippe, in an excellent paper written in 1948 on the subject of "Dominican Prayer in the Thirteenth Century" shows conclusively that our liturgical customs and our practice of private prayer also stem directly from the monastic tradition.)⁸ Perhaps no more authoritative scholar can be approached for assistance in this area than Dom Jean Leclercq, O.S.B. His classic work, *THE LOVE OF LEARNING AND THE DESIRE FOR GOD*,⁹ gives a picture of monastic culture in the 12th century which simply cannot be ignored by those who wish to grasp the medieval mentality. Speaking of what we today call "study," Dom Leclercq notes, "The two synonymous terms 'grammaticus' and 'litteratus' designate a man 'who knows how to read,' that is, not only how to decipher the letters, but to understand the texts."¹⁰ "This fundamental activity of monastic life is based on literature. For the monks in general, the foremost aid to good works is a text which makes possible the meditated reading of the word of God.... From now on can be seen the importance of letters, and of the psychological activities which it has brought about through reading and meditation...."¹² But the key to the whole subject is found in the following comments:

"This application of grammar to Scripture has been practiced in monasticism in a way that is entirely its own because it is linked with the fundamental observances of monastic life. The basic method is different from that of non-monastic circles where Scripture is read, namely the schools.... In the School it ('lectio divina') refers most often to the page itself, the text which is under study, taken objectively. In the cloister, however, it is rather the reader and the benefit that he derives from Holy Scripture which are given consideration.... The scholastic 'lectio' takes the direction of the 'quaestio' and the 'disputatio'.... The monastic 'lectio' is oriented toward the 'meditatio' and the 'oratio.' The objective of the first is science and knowledge; of the second, wisdom and appreciation. In the monastery, the 'lectio divina,' this activity which begins with grammar, terminates in compunction, in desire for heaven."¹³

Now we can grasp what St. Dominic was talking about when he distinguished between "prayer," "reading" ("meditatio," "lectio") and "study." The monks of St. Dominic's day, whether Benedictine or Cistercian, read both pagan and Christian sources in their pursuit of "l'etude des lettres." But their field of concentration was always Sacred Scripture and the Fathers. The reading of other authors was simply a means of learning how to read intelligently and to express themselves well and in the "proper form." Dom Leclercq admits that it was not always an easy matter to keep the right balance here. He remarks,

"And if there is a problem, it is because the difficulty takes the shape of a tension between two elements.... There is always the risk of weighting balance too heavily on the one side or the other. The two elements are the two constants of Western monastic culture: on the one hand, the study of letters; and on the other, the exclusive search for God, the love of eternal life and the consequent detachment from all else, including the study of letters.... The conflict can be transcended only by raising it to the spiritual order."¹⁴

It would seem, then, that St. Dominic had something quite specific in mind when he demanded "study" of his Nuns. We were to go to the Sources - Scripture and the Fathers - with an "informed attention." That is, we were to know how to read and write well, in order to build up our Faith and to protect us from error, as well as to nourish our love of God. The first Nuns of Prouille numbered converts from Albigensianism. It was indeed important that they receive a sound doctrinal formation in their new way of life since they had undoubtedly been given an unsound one previously. The Nuns of San Sisto came predominantly from two former Benedictine Abbeys. For them, the heritage of Study was a reality taken for granted. And finally, the burning impetus left by St. Bernard upon the theological culture of monastic life could not but have deeply influenced St. Dominic who numbered several Cistercian Abbots among his close friends and collaborators. The Nuns did prize Study, and St. Thomas was to put their reason into concise phrasing in the next century:

"There are two ways for a man to arrive at the knowledge of truth; the first, by what he receives from another; and for what man receives from God, prayer is required, according to the text of Wisdom (VII, 7): 'I called upon God and the spirit of wisdom came upon me....' Secondly, personal study must be used and for this meditation is necessary."¹⁵

Drawing closer to our own tradition, we can discern some special accents which identify our habits of Study. For example, Fr. R. D. Mezard, O.P., writing on the subject of "Dominican Contemplation" in *LA VIE SPIRITUELLE*, 1922, comments:

"Study and Lecture: St. Thomas teaches that study is necessary to contemplative life for two reasons: first, to be a help to contemplation by the light which it furnishes to the intellect; second, to forearm against the dangers, that is, against the errors, into which one can fall by contemplating divine things when one does not know Scripture sufficiently. Therefore, the Dominican Nuns should have doctrinal books in their hands, books that will instruct them on God, as well as on the means of perfection and prayer. The acquisition of this knowledge is one of their obligations, be it in the form of reading in common or reading done individually. A certain period should be assigned to them each day in which to give themselves to study."¹⁶

Father Gillet gave further precision to these teachings when he wrote: "Intellectuals, no; but educated religious, yes; in other words: religious who desire to know God better in order to love Him better; to love Him better in order to know Him better; and to know and love Him better in order to serve Him better." These words hark back to the most authentic attitudes of Western monasticism. They are the very "soul" of St. Bernard's search for wisdom, and they accent the importance which monastic culture has always placed on the "experience" of God. In other words, the learning which is pursued in monastic life is meant to conclude as a preparation for mystical prayer.

THE CENTURIES IN BETWEEN...

If it be true that St. Dominic gave his nuns an intellectual heritage far older than himself - for it belonged to the entire monastic tradition - it is also true that this culture was not "scholastic" or "academic" in the strict senses of the words. Fr. William Hinnebusch notes that "St. Dominic, who viewed study as an essential part of the apostolic life to be led by his friars, was the author of the intellectual bent of his Order. He made study an essential duty of the Dominican religious life and learning an indispensable requirement of its apostolate."¹⁷ The Nuns, however, never had this direct orientation to the apostolate. Yet, they were bound to be influenced by the lectures, sermons, spiritual direction, etc. of the Brethren themselves. In this connection, Fr. Hinnebusch remarks,

"Since the nuns were not pledged to the apostolic life, academic study did not find a place in their horarium. Instead of the friars' rules about study there was a chapter of their Constitutions regulating their daily manual labor."¹⁸

But, as we have already noted, it was this very Chapter XX of the San Sisto Institutions which gave primacy to Study over Manual Labor. Hence, it is not surprising to read that

"Though the nuns did no formal studying, they engaged in considerable informal intellectual life and activity. Diana and the nuns at St. Agnes' monastery in Bologna knew Latin well enough to read the voluminous correspondence from Jordan of Saxony. In the Strasburg monastery of St. Margaret some of the nuns spoke Latin fluently at the end of the 15th century."¹⁹

There were well-stocked libraries in many of the Dominican monasteries of the Middle Ages, and the nuns were involved in copying and illuminating manuscripts for use both in choir and library.²⁰ Such activities presuppose a good basic education, plus an eagerness to learn and the time to do so. It would seem that the "primitive Cistercian orientation of the house" was exactly what set the direction for the future development of the intellectual life of the Nuns, even as it provided for the place of Manual Labor. Commenting on the early Cistercian tradition, Fr. Louis J. Lekai, S.O.Cist., remarks:

"It is certainly conspicuous that in spite of the much emphasized simplicity of the early Cistercian life, a surprisingly large number of excellent scholars exalted the fame of the Order through their literary activity."²¹

And again,

"The establishment of the BERNARDINUM at Paris by Stephen Lexington rep-

resented not only the daring innovation of an able and ambitious abbot; it can also be regarded rightfully as the symbol of a new spirituality: St. Bernard's ideal of a somewhat rustic simplicity giving way to the new model of the 'learned monk,' physical labor being replaced by studies.... Among the popular explanations of Cistercian eagerness in scholastic studies, Matthew Paris, a contemporary monastic historian, presented the most common one: 'The Cistercian monks, in order to avoid the contempt of the Friars, both the Preachers and the Minors as well as of literate seculars... established houses in Paris and elsewhere where schools flourished, and started to study...so that they would not seem inferior to others.'²²

What Matthew of Paris' comment really means is that the Cistercian monks started to take up Scholastic methods of study, for they had never abandoned their own culture and had, in fact, made it flourish, as St. Bernard himself exemplifies. As far as the Dominican nuns and their history are concerned, we are greatly indebted to Fr. Hinnebusch for listing some of the highpoints of study in our monasteries, and especially in the German houses. We only wish we knew more.

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF 1971

Our new Constitutions, promulgated by Fr. Aniceto Fernandez, O.P., represent the Order's efforts to help the Nuns re-interpret their lives in accord with the directives of Vatican Council II. There is an entire Chapter devoted to 'Keeping and Hearing the Word of God.' It deals with both 'lectio divina' and Study, proper. The content proposed for our Study is fully in keeping with ancient monastic orientations: Sacred Scripture, the Fathers. In addition, we are counseled to take St. Thomas as "the greatest master whose teachings the Church singularly commends and the Order retains as a patrimony."²³ Study is presented to us as a discipline which "fosters human maturity...and contributes to the fulfillment of the evangelical counsels with a more enlightened fidelity."²⁴ We are advised to "seek suitable instruction in the liturgy in which the mystery of salvation is made present and actual."²⁵ Clearly, Study for us is still "in the monastic milieu." We have not broken with our former heritage but picked up its threads once more.

STUDY TODAY: ATTITUDES AND MEANS

In the Middle Ages monks and nuns were necessarily caught up in the need to copy manuscripts in order to keep their libraries well supplied. They had both oral and written forms of study, but the written received the greater emphasis. Grammar was the introduction to Sacred Learning. In our times, the means of communication have multiplied in all directions. We have, in addition to courses and lectures, easy access to tapes, video presentations, correspondence courses, books and lectures aplenty. The problem is often one of sorting out the really useful from the merely informational. And it would seem that many of the same criteria apply as well today as they did in the 12th or 13th centuries: we study primarily Sacred Scripture and theology, the teachings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the documents of the Magisterium and of sound theologians or exegetes. But we do so in the way that best fosters prayer. We seek wisdom more than knowledge. If we wish to face honestly the question of Study with young women who come to us these days for formation, and who have usually had at least some college or university training, it seems that we must be very clear about distinguishing the End and the Means of Study in monastic life. We do not ask them to renounce the truth they have gained in secular studies. But we should help them develop a new "taste" for learning, and the ability to discriminate on the bases of faith and solid doctrine. They often need assistance in sorting out

the values they have acquired in previous studies. We should be able to offer it in the context of our specially contemplative vocation. It is not our task either to exalt or to disvalue secular learning in itself, although we may have to expose some of its errors. But fundamentally, if we wish to be faithful to the heritage of monastic culture as St. Dominic gave it to us, then we need a firmer grasp on the attitudes which contribute to the habit of prayerful study as well as those which can impede it. If contemplation and charity are the end of our studies, the studies must be pursued in a contemplative and charitable manner. St. Bernard's advice here still seems relevant:

"Do you see...," he wrote, "how (Saint Paul the Apostle) makes the fruit and the utility of knowledge consist in the way we know? What is meant by 'the way we know'? Is it not only this, that you should recognize in what order, with what application, for what purpose and what things you should know? In what order - that you may first learn what is more conducive to salvation; with what zeal - that you may learn the more ardently what incites you the more earnestly to love; for what purpose - that you may not learn for vain glory, curiosity, or anything of the kind, but only for your own edification and that of your neighbor. For there are some who want knowledge for the sole purpose of knowing, and this is unseemly curiosity. And there are some who seek knowledge in order to be known themselves; and this is unseemly vanity... and there are also those who seek knowledge in order to sell their knowledge, for example, for money or for honors; and this is unseemly quest for gain. But there are also those who seek knowledge in order to edify and this is charity. And there are those who seek knowledge in order to be edified, and this is prudence." "In Cantica", Sermon 36, n.3 ²⁶

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

St. Paul's "Scientia inflat" was the great battlecry of 12th c. foes of the Schools. And they had a point. But it was part of the mission of the two great 13th c. Doctors, Thomas and Bonaventure, to show that even scholastic learning could be pursued virtuously. If they were here today, perhaps they would answer our fears with "Scientia inflat sed Sapientia elevat." True Wisdom - that Godly savor of divine Truth - is marked by humility, docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, charity. It inclines one to sacrifice selfish interests and to live in holy detachment. What more favorable dispositions can be fostered in common life? Can we not find our heritage spelled out for us in that dictum attributed to St. Dominic and interpreted for us by the Church in our own day? "I have made my chief study in the book of charity: it teaches everything." Study, yes, with all its ascetical effort. But Study only that we may learn how to read aright that Book of Charity which begins on earth and closes - not even in heaven.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hinnebusch, W.A., O.P., HISTORY OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER, Vol. I, Alba House, N.Y., 1966, p. 380.
2. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS, 1971, #110, 3.
3. Letter of Humbert of the Romans imposing CONSTITUTIONS OF 1259; printed in EARLY DOCUMENTS OF THE DOMINICAN SISTERS, Vol. II, Dominican Nuns of Summit, N.J., 1969.

4. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE SISTERS OF THE ORDER OF ST. DOMINIC, edited and commented upon by Rev. M.A. Potton, O.P., Rome, 1892.
5. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS OF THE SACRED ORDER OF PREACHERS, published with "Letter of Introduction" by the Master of the Order, V.R.M.S. Gillet, O.P., Rome, 1930.
6. ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF THE MASTER GENERAL TO THE NUNS OF THE ORDER ON THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS, V.R.M.S. Gillet, O.P., Rome, 1931, p. 10.
7. Gillet, *ibid.*, p. 13.
8. Philippe, Paul, O.P., "Dominican Prayer in the Thirteenth Century," *LA VIE SPIRITUELLE*, 1948.
9. Leclercq, Dom Jean, O.S.B., *THE LOVE OF LEARNING AND THE DESIRE FOR GOD*, Mentor-Omega, New American Library, N.Y., 1962.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
15. St. Thomas Aquinas, *SUMMA THEOL.* II-II, q. 180, a.3, ad 4.
16. Mezard, R.P.D., O.P., "Dominican Contemplatives," *LA VIE SPIRITUELLE*, 1922.
17. Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 4.
18. Hinnebusch, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 384.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 384.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 385.
21. Lekai, Louis J., S.O. Cist., *THE WHITE MONKS*, Cistercian Fathers, Our Lady of Spring Bank, Wisc., 1953, p. 157.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
23. CONSTITUTIONS OF THE NUNS OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS, 1971, #102, SIII.
24. *Ibid.*, #103, SI.
25. *Ibid.*, #103, SII.
26. Quoted by Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O., *THE LAST OF THE FATHERS*, Harcourt, Brace and Co., N.Y., 1954, p. 95.

HOW 'LECTIO' IN THE "MONASTIC WAY" IS STILL RELEVANT TODAYEXAMPLE I

'Lectio': Mark 2:18-22, read and compared with Matthew 9:14-19.

'Meditatio': What is Our Lord saying in this passage? Studying the text not critically, but in a prayerful manner, we might note:

1. Christian Fasting is distinguished from that practised by John's disciples and by the Pharisees. There is a deliberate break in the Tradition in order to emphasize the "Presence of the Bridegroom" - i.e., the beginning of Messianic Times.
2. When the "Groom is taken away," Christians will fast. We fast, then, to commemorate Christ's suffering and Death. We fast to help root out the sin, sinful inclinations and weaknesses which He took upon Himself in order that we might one Day "feast with Him forever."
3. "New skins for new wine." More important than any fasting Christians may practise, is the imperative need to be interiorly renewed. The "new wine" is indeed Messianic: it is Christ Himself and His doctrine; it is Charity and Truth. The "new skins" imply not only individual transformation but the whole structure of the Church: an extension of Christ's Body.
4. "New patch on old garment": it will not hold, but rips away. There is a whole new Dispensation here. It incorporates the best of the Old Law, but does not "patch" the Old Law as such. We live the New Law which is embodied in Jesus.
5. The Fasting which pleases God most is that which conforms us most closely to His Son. In this sense, "fasting" can imply the whole ascetical tradition of the Church. But it remains a means to an end. Unless corporal fasting leads to interior renewal, it is useless. Fasting or any other form of penance, unless practised with the new wine of charity and discretion will "burst the old skins." The lives of the saints show us what Our Lord meant here.
6. Perhaps the Pharisees used Fasting as a kind of barter - to buy their way into heaven. But heaven remains God's free gift. Fasting can dispose us to receive grace, but it cannot "give" grace. It has its place perennially in the life of the Church.

'Oratio': Lord Jesus, You took upon Yourself our sins and guilt, and nailed them to the Cross. Help us to be open to the grace and life You won for us at such a price! Make us "builders of Your Body" on earth in whatever ways You may wish, and give us the charity, discretion and humility we need in order to "fast" according to Your Will.

'Grammatica' or 'eruditio litterarum': The above reflections need to be checked out against the teachings of the Church. It is not sufficient to cite the fact that such-and-such-a-practise was common in the 1st, 9th or 12th centuries. We need to compare those facts with the current mind of the Church. What does the Magisterium teach about Fasting today? Is Good Friday in any way to be retained as a special day of Fast? What about other days and seasons? What does #109 or #110 of the CONSTITUTIONS ON THE SACRED LITURGY say on this subject? What do subsequent documents teach? What of the Eucharist as our daily participation in the Feast of the Lord's Supper and a true "foretaste" of beatitude? In what sense is the Groom still with us?

EXAMPLE II - THE TEMPTATIONS OF A CONTEMPLATIVE WAYFARER

'Lectio': Exodus 14:10-15.

'Meditatio':

1. When the Israelites realized their peril, they cried out to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt?... Far better for us to live as slaves of the Egyptians than to die in the desert...." When they were slaves of the Egyptians, that is, of their lower appetites and passions, they groaned mightily. They longed to be free, for the spiritual freedom they sought is, in fact, a gift of God. He prods us incessantly to throw off such shackles; to embrace Him fully and allow Him to lead us where He wills..."The truth will make you free..."
2. We set out on our journey. In the spiritual life, God does great wonders and grants times when His support is so evident, so strong, so loving, that all else fades from view. Our "enemies are silenced" and we believe we would follow Him anywhere. The "Cloud by day; the pillar of fire by night" - never perfect vision in this life, but Light enough to know Who is leading us. We do set out.
3. And then comes the moment when the enemy within us rises up again. Perhaps we had been too self-complacent? Perhaps we had grown too accustomed to God's loving support? Perhaps we had lulled ourselves into believing that the time of struggle was over...peace at last... Whatever the reason, we are caught off guard when a really serious temptation presses upon us.
4. "Leave us alone... Better to be slaves in Egypt than die in the desert." What is this but man's perennial desire for a "security" we can measure and possess on our own terms? An unwillingness to plunge into the unknown with nothing to guide us save the Light of Faith and the yearnings of hope. All other supports fail.
5. "Fear not. Stand your ground and you will see the victory...." The "Lord himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still...."

"Fear not" - fear cripples. fear blinds. fear deafens and makes us unable and unwilling to follow the Light.

"Stand your ground" - we are not asked to work miracles but only to resist the temptation to turn back.

"The Lord Himself will fight for you" - what more assurance do we need? True, we cannot fight for ourselves and win even the smallest victory. But "if God be with us, who shall be against us?"

"You have only to keep still" - O blessed stillness that patiently, confidently awaits God's saving Power! "Be still and know that I am God." This is the stillness we must at all cost preserve; the quieting of empty fears; the quelling of rebellious passions; the unrest of frustrated desires. How shall we obtain this stillness? "Abide in Me.... If you keep my word, the Father and I will come to you and take up our abode with you...." Faith in Christ. Faith in the Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity. Faith in the sacramental life of the Church. Faith in others. Faith driven by Hope. Faith ever seeking greater Charity. The Way of the Pilgrim is the Way of Faith.

'Oratio': Perhaps simply wordless surrender and adoration.

'Grammatica' or 'eruditio litterarum' as interpreted in our Constitutions: How does St. Thomas relate Faith to Hope and Charity? What do documents such as 'Lumen Gentium' or 'Venite Seorsum' teach on "Exodus" theme? How does the Theology of the Eucharist fit in here? How do our Constitutions use the "Exodus" theme? How is it related to the eschatological dimension of our life - as understood in the medieval sense of ardent yearning for heaven?

STUDY IN OUR DOMINICAN MONASTIC LIFE
(Some references toward a study)

I. As related to the mission of the Church

"This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and STUDY made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts, through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. . . ." (DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION, Vatican Council II, Section 8)

II. As related to the Dominican Order and the ministry of the Word

- A. "Dominican spirituality (also) means: religious evangelical living (vita apostolica) as the atmosphere within which the Dominican is apostolic, by proclaiming the Gospel in every possible way. . . . There must be harmony between what one proclaims and how one lives. This is what St. Thomas (II-II, 188, art. 6 and 7) sees as typical for the 'mendicants' over against the other religious institutes, and he connects this specific character also with 'poverty' - freedom from financial worries. This vision, which applies to all mendicants, becomes typically Dominican when STUDY receives an essential place in the structure of this Dominican evangelism. The element of STUDY was precisely not part and parcel of the evangelical movements of the Middle Ages. In his commentary on the Constitutions, Humbert of Romans puts it this way: 'STUDY is not the aim of the Order, but an essential tool towards its aim.' Lack of sound knowledge was one of the causes why many evangelical movements failed badly. . . . Dominic saw this clearly and this is why he fitted STUDY as an institutional element into the very structure of his Order." (Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., "Dominican Spirituality," article in 1975 issues of DOMINICAN TOPICS IN SOUTH AFRICA)
- B. "What is more strictly specific to our Order is our decidedly doctrinal orientation: a certain hereditary sensibility for the 'truth' of the faith (a truth to be loved, to be deepened, to be defended), which has characterized the structure and mentality of the Order." (Valentine Walgrave, O.P., DOMINICAN SELF-APPRAISAL IN THE LIGHT OF THE COUNCIL, Priory Press, 1968)
- C. "Jesus fashioned St. Dominic by giving him a particularly touching aspect of his features to reproduce: that of the Master of Galilee saving men by enlightening them with the light of truth before redeeming them with his crucifixion. . . . The truth he (Dominic) learnt and contemplated was the privileged means of discovering God and uniting himself to him." (M.-H. Vicaire, O.P., SAINT DOMINIC AND HIS TIMES, 1964, pp. 390-1)
- D. STUDY, as a religious observance for the nuns:
-was included by Dominic in the Primitive Constitutions of San Sisto (cf. #34);
-was not in Humbert's 1259 revision, nor in the 1930 revision;
-is included again in the 1971 revision (cf. Chapter Three).

III. As related to a life of prayer in Monastic Life

- A. See MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY by Claude Peifer, O.S.B. (Sheed and Ward, 1966), especially pp. 73 ff. The Biblical Inspiration of Monasticism; pp. 392 ff. Lectio Divina (p. 397: STUDY in modern sense is of value, but differs from lectio.); pp. 412 ff. on the Psalms (p. 413: "STUDY is first of all required to understand the literal sense of the psalms, which is the indispensable foundation for their religious value.").
- B. From Thomas Merton - some unpublished notes on the reading of Scripture: Lectio divina - properly so-called - reading mingled with prayer, contact with God. In this last there may well be necessary intermediate steps, e.g., STUDYING the literal sense. To jump over the intermediate steps and try to pray immediately may end in self-deception and waste of time. In all of the steps we are helped by the Holy Spirit.
- C. From Dom Jean Leclercq, O.S.B.:
- 1) "They (books) sharpened the mind and opened it to the action of grace. They were a meeting point between the effort of man and the gift of God." ("Books and Reading in Medieval Cloisters" in ASPECTS OF MONASTICISM, Cistercian Publications, 1978)
 - 2) "Father Damasus' way of writing about the Scriptures is nothing else than the traditional monastic way of 'meditation': not stirring up ideas, no matter how perceptive, but careful STUDY of the literal sense, the discovery therein of a content hidden because spiritual, the desire of accomplishing it. It is, therefore, to bring together thought and love, to participate in that meditation of the Church which is the celebration of the eucharist, in which 'thought and action merge in a perfect unity.'" (Introduction to PATHWAYS IN SCRIPTURE by Damasus Winzen, Word of Life Press, Ann Arbor, 1976)
 - 3) See his book THE LOVE OF LEARNING AND THE DESIRE FOR GOD (New York: Fordham University Press).

Some thoughts toward a conclusion:

STUDY is a part of the Church's mission in developing and handing down the words and realities received from the apostles. It is a specific element in the Dominican Order's ministry of the Word - an integral part of Dominic's charism.

As shared in by the nuns of the Order, STUDY is also a contributing element in the integral living of a monastic life, which is largely comprised of lectio divina, praying the psalms, and a quiet but alert receptivity to the Spirit's gift of prayer.

Paraphrasing St. Thomas (in another context, cf. SUMMA, I, q. 43, a. 5, ad 2), we could say that the fruit of their STUDY is not assimilation of (or likeness to) just "any sort of word, but the Word who breathes forth Love."

OUR CONTEMPLATIVE FORMATION

(Synthesis of two talks on formation given at
a National Workshop for contemplatives on
FEMININE MONASTIC LIFE in Avila, 1974)

One of the talks was given by a Dominican Nun from the
Monastery at Olmedo, Spain. The synthesis of the talks
was translated by Sister Maria Maez. What follows here
is a brief summary of her translation.

What we sometimes call initial formation is really the formation that should be the same from the first day to the last.

The emphasis that the Council places on silence and solitude for contemplatives would indicate that "it is in this atmosphere that prayer can best be developed. For it is in this ambient that deep, peaceful and quiet prayer is formed."

Pointing out the difficulty that can be involved in combining the love of solitude and community life, it is suggested that we need "a good program of formation in the art of solitude." "Our solitude receives its richness from silence . . . which is indispensable for the cultivation of peace and prayer."

Next the importance of the Scriptures is indicated. "Let us acknowledge the excellence of the Living Word of God and do all in our power to dispose ourselves and those in our charge to come in contact with the Word of God." References to St. Jerome and St. Benedict follow, along with mention of the importance of lectio divina.

In speaking of "forming" true contemplatives, "we believe that it is most important to create a conducive atmosphere in which to do this. Our youth are not impressed by ideas; they are looking for 'life' and they have to meet the ideal incarnated or as a lived reality. 'Contemporary man listens and is more attentive to the witnesses than to the teachers, and if they listen to the teachers it is because they are witnesses' (Paul VI)." "This is why the formation to the contemplative life depends on the formation of the community that welcomes them."

"And how can we describe such a community?" We think the following are the fundamental things that should distinguish such a community: A community that will be noted for Truth. . . that from living this Truth logically, there follows unity. From this there will flow a sisterliness, where there can be unity in diversity, of desire, of efforts, and of help. From the experience of embracing this Truth in love, there will come forth joy, that will inundate life. The community should give a strong testimony of that which will be expected of the novice. Above all, let it be a faithful and true testimony of a praying community and a community that treasures silence. For it is in this atmosphere that the novice will be able more quickly to sense the transcendence and absoluteness of the living God. It is essential that it be open to all the joys, hopes, hardships, anxieties of the modern world. It must be sensitive to the deep mystery of brotherhood and humanity. And it must be conscious of its vocation or calling to be Missionary in the Church.

From the very beginning the core of formation should be Jesus Christ. The liturgy should play an important part in this study of Jesus. If the monastery lives the liturgy intensely, the novice will easily discover him in all his mysteries. She will very easily come to the conclusion that her life is to live in him. "When the liturgy is lived collectively, internally and externally, it constitutes an element of formation of the first order." The importance of study, of responsibility, and of work are then indicated.

CHEZ LES DOMINICAINES

Reports from twelve Dominican Nuns
of Notre Dame Federation about a
Session at the Benedictine Abbey,
Pierre-qui-Vire, in April 1978
(Translated from the French by a
North Guilford community member)

All of the reports speak with enthusiasm about "this privileged spot" and how enriching it was for everyone: the atmosphere of peace and silence in a particularly well-chosen setting, the participation in the Office, the simple and fraternal contacts with brothers or groups of brothers from the Abbey.

The very night of our arrival, in a chapel in the guest-house, we were united in the Eucharist, celebrated by Father Germain, the cellarer, who was to be our first speaker; here we could already sense his spiritual depth and his "humanity". . . .

The following morning two very comprehensive questionnaires were distributed by Father Germain: one on "Work and Prayer" and the other on "Relationships"; these were to prepare us for our session with him. Divided into three groups, we got to work. . . .

"Simple and deep family bonds were immediately established among us, all daughters of St. Dominic - very naturally, without fears, as if we had always known one another."

In fact "we were bearers of a long-term experience of religious life which fostered listening and mutual confidence."

The two meetings with Father Germain on Monday and Wednesday were really more like conversations and we were quick to perceive that it was best to simply let him speak from the fulness of his heart and soul: this "man of experience and common sense, whose spiritual and human integration impressed all of us."

"The basic reality of our lives being so similar, our virtually identical problems with work and community life were cast in a new light by this Benedictine approach and the riches to be found in a perspective other than the one with which we are most familiar."

. . . Here we will only cite a few points mentioned in three of the reports: "to desire intensely the unification of our lives in 'prayer - work'; God is not indifferent to anything that we do. To let go of our rational mentality in order to be more open to the movement of the Spirit and his freedom."

On the subject of relationships, in the commentary on several passages from THE LITTLE PRINCE, one sister remarks: "the very enlightening distinction between the person and the personality: the 'unique rose' and 'the character' created by our own fears"; "we are in a climate of mystery - mystery of the person who is sacred. It is charity which leads us beyond the surface personality of the other, whereas fear prevents this."

In Father Marneffe we found a Brother in St. Dominic: three packed conferences - the maximum in a limited space of time - on:

- Responsibility: its sources, its practice, its terms.
- A reevaluation of the vow of obedience in the context of Responsibility.
- The exercise of authority, yesterday and today.

These conferences were recorded on tape by Langeac and Ferriere, and will undoubtedly circulate among the monasteries; unless one or the other is fortunate enough to hear the speaker in person - the subject is well worth it.

We also found here points in common with Father Germain's lecture:

"The Spirit is at work at every stage of the religious life."

"To surrender oneself to him ensures an altogether uncomfortable way of life."

All of this has made the participants, as well as the monasteries, ever more eager to continue "to explore these topics which are so central in our lives and very much in line with the task of the federation."

Father Duval followed on Thursday and Friday, speaking to us of the specific charism of our Dominican life. He first of all reminded us of the importance of the relationship between "the brothers and sisters" which is constitutive for the Order (identical terms are found in the Constitutions of both the Brothers and the Sisters).

The Dominican vocation is the service of the Word lived in community: "The Brothers fulfill their vocation primarily through preaching; the nuns - commissioned to prayer - listen, celebrate, keep the Word, and proclaim the Gospel of God by the very example of their lives." (paragraph 100, Nuns' Constitutions)

We then discussed the difference of perspective with the Benedictine rule and the different ways of understanding obedience and authority, "the fundamental value being the person of Christ surrendered to the Will of the Father for the salvation of the world."

Then two more questions were broached: enclosure and egress. A number of monasteries shared their experiences in this area, which was enlightening for all of us. Everywhere there seems to be the search for a well-balanced life, by way of beneficial departures from the ordinary rhythm, while at the same time having a concern to maintain a strong and exacting mode of life.

We tried to answer Sister Suzanne's questions about the Federation: "the goal of the federal Assemblies is precisely to make the Federation a living thing." On this the wish was expressed that it would not always be the same sister who would be sent as delegate to the Assembly. "The personal benefit of meetings as ours is in experiencing that one is an active member of the Federation; information cannot take the place of personal bonds; by such meetings the experience of one monastery can profit the others and help us to proceed with our own evolution."

. . .
We must add for all of them "the benefit of knowing each other better, of understanding better the options chosen in one place or another, even if they cannot be adopted elsewhere." "It was a precious thing to have heard our sisters speaking directly about their monasteries; such an exchange permits a sense of perspective and the dissolving of prejudice." Even through our differences, "we discovered some identical problems to be resolved, and here and there some interesting solutions to be studied." One sister underscores the benefits "of the rupture involved in such an outing, the departure from the regular life and milieu: a relaxation and retreat sometimes necessary in order to take up the life once again with clearer insight and greater fervor."

Many have expressed the hope that this meeting will not end without follow-up; "that this privileged relationship may continue among us and contribute toward the spiritual growth of our communities, according to the charism of the Order."

One report concludes: "How can we not hope that other sisters could have a similar experience, in order to enter ever more deeply into the designs of God, while following Dominic our Father."

Note: The section of LE LIEN translated above was supplied by Sister Mary Jean Walsh, O.P. (Sta. Sabina, Rome). It is published every three months by the "Nuns' Service", an organization open to all Contemplative Nuns in France. (Sister said the Dominicans are quite active in the organization; the Fathers conduct correspondence courses, etc.) The present secretary of the Service happens to be Soeur Marie-Denise Pontal, O.P., Monastere de la Croix Etiolles 91450 Soisy-sur-Seine France.

Article in VIE CONSACREE
May-June 1972
Translated from the French

(In response to some
Spanish Dominican Nuns)

(See brief English summary
in CISTERCIAN STUDIES
Vol. XI 1976:1.)

TRUTH AND THE FUTURE OF CONTEMPLATIVES

Several cloistered Dominicans in Spain¹ asked me about the meaning of their vocation. To answer them, I undertook to question the religious in a Dominican "cloistered" community. What follows comes as much from them as it does from me. It is, if you will, my witness verified, enriched, and confirmed by theirs.

One remark before we begin, a remark that will come up again further under other forms: the sisters, like myself were astonished by the importance that seemed to be attributed to the cloister: the Spanish expression: monjas de clausura (cloistered nuns) comes up again in each question. Perhaps it is simply a question of the habitual manner of speaking in Castilian. In France, the term "moniale" suffices: it implies the life in a cloister. But the idea of "cloister" appears secondary. We will use as a principal term, the word "contemplatives", but we must explain exactly what it means.

The period when there were grilles (sometimes with barbed wire on the outer side!), veils, whispering voices answering while the visitor didn't see the faces they belonged to: all of that in France comes from the past, that even now we can hardly believe was but yesterday. When we preceded a worker who was coming to repair a faucet or a window with a little bell, as they used to do for the lepers in the Middle Ages, from what pre-historic period did that come? Everyone agrees: the cloister doesn't mean that. We must apply here the general principles of ethics on the relationship between means and ends, principles, which shape for example the classic theology of dispensation. The means are made in order to obtain or facilitate the end; they must not become ends in themselves. I would not know how, except in the case of a vocation which is completely extraordinary, to justify cloister where nuns are completely removed from physical view and from the presence of men (in the generic sense of this term). The cloister can only consist in a preparation of a place or environment of silence and of peace, that is, of retreat, with a view to attaining a greater availability, a greater openness to a life of prayer, or, if we understand this term well, to contemplation.

I say: if we understand this term well. We have often in effect, associated with the words "contemplation", "contemplative life", the idea either of a kind of void or of a spiritual activity which is carried on to be sure in a context of prayer, but which picks up something nonetheless from speculation, from the Greek word theoria. It would suppose that the mystery of God and the conditions of our union with God would be set forth as an object to our spirit and that it would be necessary to consider while we extend the spirit as much as we can toward God and while we isolate ourselves for that reason from everything that happens around us and in the world. This idea can contain a certain amount of truth. In fact, the monastic tradition has absorbed a certain amount of platonism and pythagorism. This is a fact historically. It is not, however, its greatest distinction. What shall we say then? Let us suppose

¹The Dominican Nuns in Spain belong to the Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena in Valencia.

that we have grasped the classic distinction between the active life and the contemplative life. I do not intend to give a discourse on that, for I recognize that I am incapable of it, but let me note three points which seem very important to me:

a. The contemplative life as practised in the Church. Vatican II has insisted on placing it, as well as the entire practice of the evangelical counsels, within the total life of the Church, the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. As for the rest, even the hermits conceive their life in this way. The example of St. Dominic, of Therese of Lisieux, of Father de Foucauld, are equally meaningful.² It is up to each community, to each religious, to translate this in a personal way.

b. The contemplative life is a life of union with God. We must live from God, unite ourselves to God there where he is. So then - and this is the lesson of the prophets - God is there where his holy and sanctifying will is recognized and obeyed. This not only applies to us with respect to the Rule, to the bell, to the Mother Prioress, not only either with respect to the interior calls which we can perceive, but rather to whatever God expects from us in the service of his plan of salvation and in the encounters which he gives us. A contemplative soul finds God also in events and in other people: these events and other people are also the place and the occasion of his or her union with God. One is not united with God in a void protected by a cloister which separates one entirely from others.

c. We must also listen to God there where he speaks. He speaks to us in and through the Scriptures: there is this wonderful tradition of lectio divina as the fundamental occupation of the contemplative. This is something very different from the pure study of the scholar or scientist. God speaks to us in prayer, especially that of the Office and of the liturgy. For myself, I owe to the liturgy lived according to its annual cycle the better half of what I have been able to understand of Christian mysteries. God speaks to us also in and through whatever happens to us through all those whom we meet and through whatever happens in the world and in the life of men. But in all of that, the contemplative looks for, under the action of the Holy Spirit, a certain depth in his perception of the ways in the plan of God, of God's presence and of his mystery. I would speak of wisdom, if the word did not carry, in itself, a certain ambiguity because of the fact that it has been used at times by small groups who are rather closed, and who attribute to themselves, not without self-satisfaction, a certain privilege of purity. This "wisdom" runs the risk of becoming an ideology. But I would happily speak of wisdom, if one could use it without ambiguity, according to the plan and thinking of St. Paul (cf. Ephesians 1 and 3; 1 Corinthians 1:17 - 2:16). The true contemplative is he who, in his zeal to understand the Word of God, in the simplicity and the openness of his heart, attains a certain depth of understanding of God and of his grace.

All of that said, I come now to the questions that have been put to me.

I. How can we justify or explain the existence of cloistered nuns in our modern world?
Must the nuns seek to justify themselves to the world?

The first answer leads us on, and it has its truth; from the point of view of the world the life of contemplative sisters is a folly: the world can understand it all the less, since stories and films full of generalities and carrying to extremes some facts, which have been more or less well interpreted, these films and stories have presented this life as receptive to obsessed neurotics, or worse, to sexual perverts, or sado-masochists.

We cannot "empty the cross" (of its power) nor what the cross always shows us that is humanly incomprehensible and scandalous (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17 - 25). A sister has

²See my article Dans la communion des saints. A propos du testament de saint Dominique, in La Vie Spirituelle, November 1970, pp. 331-347.

said: "Humanly our life is not justifiable, for it has no human finality. It wishes to exist only for the absolute of God, for gratuitous praise, and in the response of our freedom to the invitation to enter into his friendship. Its justification is therefore the transcendence of God and Faith." At the most those who are strangers to it can recognize, when they see sisters who are normal, joyous, and open: "It's their idea. . . .It's a voluntary choice, therefore it's respectable." This is all on condition, of course, that the cloister and the observances do not appear as an arbitrarily imposed burden, but rather as an environment which is conducive to a certain quality of life, forming with this life a whole that is balanced and coherent.

A good number of our contemporaries are open to a much more positive feeling, on certain conditions, however. They are tired of techniques of comfort and distraction. . . . If contemplatives are in truth what they profess to be, witnesses of the transcendence of God as giving to human life a meaning and an opportunity for fullness in human sharing, contemplatives will fulfill in a superior way, on their part, a task which is incumbent also on the entire Church: to offer places where man can recollect himself, find once again the meanings of things and of himself, criticize, judge clearly what is alienated, be received without being judged, express himself freely, communicate with others, and experience the power of love.

All of this presupposes that the contemplatives exercise, according to their possibilities, what has always been within the vocation of monks: hospitality, openness. If men who seek that, find only grim grilles, an over polite reception, which is at the same time distant and remote, offices which are incomprehensible, they will flee, with the exception of those who are living in the past, and who look for a refuge outside of real life, because they have no grasp of real life. If, on the other hand, they find an open welcome, simplicity, realism which comes from a poor life which exists through work, if we offer them the possibility to express themselves, to share the prayer and the fruit of the meditation of the Word of God, then they will come to believe that this life is valid, in the Christian sense, and in the human sense. Obviously, this requires from contemplatives the sacrifice of many of the "traditional" details: as a Prior of a Carmel said on television, it demands not the abandonment of the Rule, but the re-thinking of the rules. Something that can do a great deal to find, and make manifest this note of truth, is the work by which we gain our livelihood. It brings sisters together, and it leads them to a truth of life and of judgment; it makes them share, and understand the conditions that men live under, and it is for these men a guarantee of authenticity.

"For our part," says a sister, "everything depends on our truth: the truth of our life, founded on the truth of our prayer, expressed by the truth of our fraternal life, by the reality of our labor, by the seriousness of our confrontation with the Word, by the sincerity of our material simplicity, by the authenticity of our unity, of our joy, of our freedom."

This answers question II: What is it in the life of "cloistered" nuns that has attracted the most attention?

III. What values of "cloistered" life should we encourage more in our day?

This question has already been answered for the most part. The sisters have greatly appreciated an article which is in truth a remarkable article, by the beloved Thomas Merton.³ He defines there very happily the opening invitation to the world to which the Council invited all the Church, and then also the contemplatives. He writes: "Contemplatives are not exempt from this but they have to understand it in their own terms. In other words, they must consider how, and to what extent they can be 'open to the world' without losing their identity as contemplatives. . . . There can be no question whatever of the Church asking contemplatives to engage in work for which they are not qualified. It is not a question of asking a Carmelite to teach arithmetic to ten year old children. . . . What the Church needs is for contemplatives to share with

³"Openness and Cloister," in CISTERCIAN STUDIES, Volume II, 1967:4. (In this English volume the pages cited are p. 313 and p. 319.)

others their privileges of silence, adoration (worship), and meditation, their capacity to listen more closely and to penetrate deeper into the Word of God, also their understanding of sacrifice, their perception of supernatural things (inner vision)." One must really read the continuation of this, where Merton points out some of the very concrete requirements of this program.

The sisters themselves insist primarily on the truth of their life of prayer, and secondarily that this sign of their life should be understood by men, on the openness, the sharing, and of their peace and their prayer. In fact, isn't it essentially that, which has created the world-wide influence of Taizé, which is indisputably a sign of our times. One sister added: "What is important, is unity in charity, so that our choral prayer does not become a lie and that we can chant, all of us with a single chorus (heart), in the first person singular: 'My God, hear my cry, hear my prayer', 'With those who hate peace, I remain peaceful.' . . . We must admit that we are far from this attitude, and that we must learn again day by day to live what St. Paul says of charity in 1 Corinthians 13. . . ."

What values shall we intensify? Those of openness, but first a greater truth of the realities, which give to this openness its essence and its foundation: prayer, fraternity, charity. Nearly all of the sisters answered the question with this: to be more authentically what we profess to be, and to let this be seen by men, without imposing anything on them, without asking anything from them.

IV. How to see the future of "cloistered" nuns (we have decided to call them contemplatives). What do these nuns expect of religious (their religious brothers)?

The cry has issued from several mouths: it is despair; there hasn't been a vocation in ten or fifteen years. One does not see any young sister entering our community. . . . Perhaps several together. One can truly receive them knowing that they are questioning us and many of the things which are still dear to us. . . . What should we do? . . .

Many sisters, perhaps the same ones, hope against hope: God will provide. There will always be souls called to live gratuitously, as an absolute for God. That is also what I think. I am convinced that the religious life and the contemplative life have a future. The problem is: under what form? Will it be under that which we have known, and loved, and that we perpetuate? Thomas Merton states: "Our younger religious have very grave problems with the legacy of the past, however valid it may once have been. Experience has shown us that if we simply refuse the challenge of renewal, and do no more than maintain archaic values, the cloistered life has no future."⁴

A sister expresses herself with exactly the same meaning, and says: "Why is there the difference that exists between the cloister of contemplative women and the cloister of contemplative men? The justification for our life is made more difficult by this: to a serious degree it gets in the way of openness and of sharing; we become inaccessible, and unknown. Much more so than we were ten years ago, for the mentality of youth has changed radically. They no longer believe in proofs and discourses, they want to see, experiment, experience, participate. . . . The monastic institution, as it now exists, seems to me, ill-adapted to the modern world. If we cannot quickly find an alternative to this static state of affairs, will we be able to pass on our tradition to him who will find himself tomorrow under the breath of the Spirit?" It is I who have added and underlined "as it now exists," because I will not abandon easily the idea of the "monastic institution". But it must be opened, adapted.

I have only to copy what another of the sisters said of what they expect of religious men. "Preaching, to stimulate our prayer and our hearing of the Word in meditation; theological and biblical teaching; some fraternal contacts to keep us aware of the problems in the world and of their apostolate. And finally, we hope that they will send us new vocations."

Here are the very brief responses to immense questions. I will add simply that we must not let all our attention be diverted by the problems and the difficulties of the of the moment. We should keep our eyes, first of all on the essential, without taking refuge in a supernaturalism which is some place between heaven and earth, and which is a stranger to history. For everything is historical. The absolute is never given to us except in relative forms. We carry the treasure of our vocation in vessels of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7).

⁴Ibid., p. 312.

CENTENARY FOR DOMINICAN NUNS IN THE UNITED STATES

"Unmistakably Saint Dominic was to be my father, if I were fortunate enough to be admitted among his children."

Sometime in the life of each one of us, today's daughters of Saint Dominic, has come the realization of vocation expressed in the above sentence. In the one whose heart first uttered the words they were a spontaneous cry as her first concentrated study of the Dominican Nuns' Constitutions became the vial from which the Spirit of God poured upon her his anointing oil of gladness and strength for the mission to which he had predestined her: the bringing of the life of the Nuns of Saint Dominic's Order to the United States. The cry was the glad climax of a search, a leading and an evolution in the life of Julia Crooks stretching over the twenty years since, at the age of fourteen, a powerful touch of the Lord left upon her an unforgettable intuition that was to unveil its full meaning slowly, but with all that quiet surety that marks the Holy Spirit's authentic works.

Julia was now thirty-four, and only recently freed from family responsibilities which had kept her from following the call to monastic contemplative life which had been growing increasingly strong within her. It was the Spring of 1873. Some time previously she had left the United States where the two or three monasteries of contemplative women then in existence failed to elicit a confirming response of the Spirit in her own heart. Likewise, a second "call", confirmed by her spiritual director, had been taking shape: to be instrumental in bringing contemplative life (in an as yet undefined way) to her country.

She had come to France, led by a quiet urging within, telling her that somewhere in that country was the answer to God's word long maturing in her heart. Here she had been investigating several monasteries of nuns of the more familiar monastic Orders but none of them drew her to give the response of commitment that was beckoning to her. Puzzled, she was pausing now to make a decisive retreat in order to discern more attentively what she had thought was God's call.

God's Providence had eternally predestined the place for her retreat: a tiny room outside the enclosure of the Dominican "Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament" at Cullins. It was Julia's first encounter with the life of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers. On the fifth day of the retreat she asked the prioress if she might be allowed to study their Book of Constitutions. As she pored over its pages she knew that her search was ended. Joy and fulfilment mingle with humility in her own words expressing quite simply her exultation: "Unmistakably Saint Dominic was to be my father, if I were fortunate enough to be admitted among his children."

Julia's search, waiting and uncertainty had been long. Surety now replaced them and her response was prompt. Not many weeks after her retreat, on Pentecost Monday, June 2, 1873, she entered the Oullins Monastery as a postulant. Nine weeks later, on August 5, 1873, she was vested in the habit of the Order and given her religious name: Sister Mary of Jesus. Her acceptance as a member of the monastery was linked with an explicit understanding that at a future propitious time she would return to her own country to establish there the life of the Nuns of her Order. Seven years of formation and maturing followed. They were for her a time of peaceful waiting for God's hour to be revealed.

Paralleling his providential leading in Sister Mary of Jesus' life had been God's direction of the career of a young man born the same year as herself. Michael Augustine Corrigan had come to know Julia Crooks when his brother married one of her nieces. One of the first band of twelve seminarians when the North American College opened at Rome in 1859, Corrigan was ordained to the priesthood in 1863. He closely served the first Bishop of Newark in positions of responsibility till he was appointed, ten years later, to succeed him as head of the See of Newark which was then co-terminous with the entire state of New Jersey.

Bishop Michael Corrigan's ability in administration was matched by esteem for and practice of a life of deep prayer. One of his first dreams for the development of his diocese was the establishment within it of a monastery of contemplative nuns. For this he naturally turned his thoughts to Julia Crooks whose decisive retreat at the Dominican monastery at Oullins had been made as he was preparing for his episcopal ordination on May 4, 1873. He was not slow to see in her vocation God's linking of their two lives in a new way. One of the earliest letters Julia received at Oullins was from Bishop Corrigan. He wrote of his new responsibility to lead the church of Newark and then added: "God placed this cross on my shoulders, and lightened it at once with the bright hope that before long perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will, through your vocation, be brought to Newark."

In the ensuing years, Bishop Corrigan remained in contact with the Oullins monastery and its prioress with whom he had come to a conclusive understanding about the foundation he desired. At last, in the Fall of 1879, the prioress wrote to him saying that she was ready to send at his bidding Sister Mary of Jesus and three other nuns to start the new monastery at Newark. This letter crossed on the high seas a letter from the Bishop requesting that the nuns for a foundation might come soon. "Truly," said the prioress, "this is the hour of God - when two souls separated by the great ocean have thoughts in unison!" The last preliminaries to the foundation were accordingly undertaken and the time was set for early the next Summer.

On the feast of Saint John the Baptist, June 24, 1880, the four pioneer nuns crossed the threshold of their French cloister en route for the United States. Bright in their hearts burned the Flame with which they were to kindle a new fire in that land.

From all the material connected with the beginnings and first hundred years of the Nuns of our Order in the U.S.A., we have selected here but these few highlights in the lives of two of the leading instruments in its first foundation. And we have chosen not so much to dwell on historical details as to focus on the interaction of Divine Wisdom and human response in bringing about a work that we from the perspective of a hundred years can contemplate in a fulness that our early sisters could only glimpse in faith and trust. Each of our monasteries in the United States has, in turn, its own story to tell of the marvelous ordering of Providence as one by one under its guidance our communities have come into existence.

For all of us the Centenary Celebration of Dominican Contemplative Life in our country is a summons to proclaim the marvelous deeds the Lord has done through those who have passed on to us the rich heritage of our mission in the Church and the Order of Preachers. And for each of us, personally, the Centenary stirs up a summons from deep within us to renew our sense of "destiny" in our own lives, a destiny eternally intertwined with our having Saint Dominic to be our father, of being fortunate enough to be admitted as his daughters.

* A fuller account of the Newark Foundation and those who shared in making it will be found in a Centenary Commemorative Booklet prepared by the Monastery of Saint Dominic for the occasion.

LETTER TO LOUIS M. CARDINAL CAVEROT, ARCHBISHOP OF LYONS
From Michael A. Corrigan, Bishop of Newark
(Translated from the French)

July 9, 1880

To His Eminence Cardinal Caverot
Archbishop of Lyons

I hasten to acknowledge the reception of Your Eminence's letter* and the arrival of the interesting colony from Oullins. The good women disembarked at New York the 7th of this month. They remained there a day to rest up after the fatigues of a sea voyage that was really painful for them.

After they were refreshed and had received the blessing of the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, they took the direction of their destination which for the time being is the major seminary where they are actually in the company of some Sisters of Charity.

Every good work encounters difficulties. That which we have now undertaken to establish in our diocese will have its share of them, I doubt it not, because the work is new for our country and not a popular one.

The diocese of Newark is situated between the two large archdioceses of New York and Philadelphia in which the door has not yet been thrown open to Contemplative Orders. Our American people require to have good done before their eyes, or to feel it before they believe in it. That is the spirit of the country, and it is difficult even for the best natures to entirely escape it. Being convinced myself, however, that the spirit of the gospel is superior to this spirit of the world, I am confident that God will bless our undertaking and that our diocese will derive from it abundant fruits.

I am grateful to Your Eminence for your care and foresight in directing these good sisters in the path they are to follow for the present and in the future.

Your Eminence can rest assured that just as long as it will please God to leave me at the head of the diocese of Newark I shall not forget your touching solicitude toward these holy daughters and the warm recommendation you made to me in their regard.

. . . As the Convent of Saint Dominic at Newark will be the spiritual daughter of the Monastery of Oullins, I am very happy and proud to be considered a dependent of Your Eminence and to sign myself with most profound gratitude and filial submission,
Your Eminence's most devoted servant,

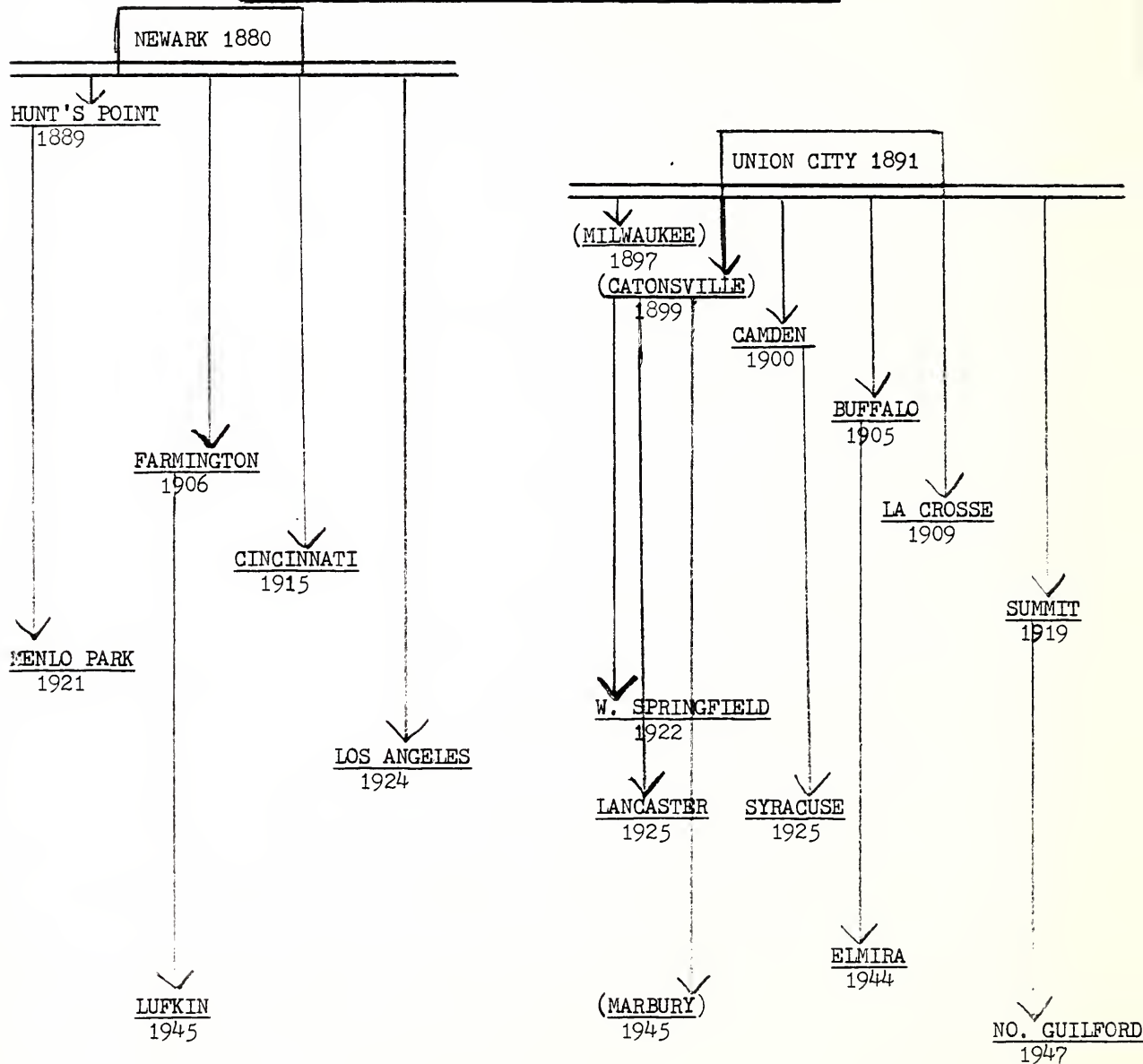
Michael Augustine

Bishop of Newark

*The letter here referred to was given to the Bishop by Sister Mary of Jesus on the arrival of the Dominican nuns in the Newark diocese. It was the Cardinal's official presentation of the four foundresses to their new Bishop.

From
 PROUILLE, FRANCE 1206
 founded by St. Dominic
 through
 many and varied descendants
 to

DOMINICAN MONASTERIES IN THE UNITED STATES



Monasteries founded from the United States include one in Glasgow (1948), Fatima (1954), Karachi, Pakistan (1959), Nairobi, Kenya (1965), and two in the Philippines (1977).

